

I've Lived
Long Enough
to Learn.....

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The “suspended me” with, left to right: Ernie, Bobby and Eddie,
the loving brothers who have always been there for me
during my long journey.

Chapter 1:

How It Began

Over the past 18 months, my daughter Meg in Florida and I have exchanged scores of letters. She had the wonderful idea to delve into my memory of my 94-year-old life. She had become extremely interested in questioning me about the events that transpired during that time period. I dug into my memory and tried my best to enlighten her. It has been rewarding for both of us because it brought back many things I had completely forgotten about and at the same time provided her with stories about events that were new to her. Fortunately, I made copies of all my answers so that my sons Gregg in New Jersey and Chris in Pennsylvania could read them and learn more about their father's and other ancestors' experiences. I recently decided to organize the answers into a hard-covered book, which would allow all three of my children to not only have it, but to enable them to make it available to their descendants in future years. This book represents a very personal set of snippets, a peek into my past and my thoughts, initially in answer to Meg's questions, and then expanded to widen the focus and speak to a broader nuclear family audience now and in the future.

So let's begin with me approaching my 95th year, living in this home that my father and grandfather built with the assistance of several accomplished job-specific tradesmen nearly 96 years ago. I was raised in a lower-middle class family, which consisted of my paternal grandparents, my parents, and five siblings. Among the many virtues they attempted to instill in their children were words like "honesty," "hardworking," "fairness," and "religious." Although my late next-older brother and I had the usual sibling rivalry, he was my mentor, taught me much, and always stood up for me in fights. As we got older, our relationship improved, and we teamed well on basketball and softball teams.

My younger two brothers are an incredible pair. Both are kind, caring, respectful, intelligent, and family-oriented. They always were, and I expect always will be. They were wonderful to watch growing up. They were always fun to be with, quick to learn, understand, flexible, and the bright spots of our family. They have continually improved with age, and I have already written much about them in my previous books.

We have experienced the loss of one nine-year-old brother (1936) through rheumatic fever because, sadly, penicillin had not yet arrived on the scene. Also, in 2012, we lost my older brother who had lived 83 years, with many successful accomplishments in the education field and also the sport of basketball, having contributed greatly to both of these undertakings.

It's at this point that I must point out that this book is solely about my ancestors and my experiences, events and journey through life. My siblings' perceptions of these events belong only to them, and I have not tried to relate, explain, or describe LIFE as they have lived it. These events are strictly for my descendants, both now and in their future lives. This is not intended to be a history of my entire family, only a peek at what I personally experienced in these past 94 years. My goal is to provide the reader with a virtual movie to enable you to visualize and experience events in my long life that transpired in the past nine plus decades. You will be viewing these aspects of my journey primarily through a single perspective, my point of view. It will be my perceptions of these events. It means what you read will have been filtered through the prism of my lifetime of experiences. Everything I have ever seen, or that impacted me, will color these events. You'll be seeing a Norman Joseph Hobbie Production. This "movie" of my evolved world has been edited to omit those few stories that will only reside in my mind...and will depart with me when my time is up. Otherwise, you'll read about the humdrum, the pizzazz, a few warts, and things I lived for 94 years. It's the way I saw it.

In writing this story, I only became specific about my family if one of my siblings shared an event I was unaware of or only had an

incomplete picture of reality. So essentially, the pages that follow primarily contain my perception of occurrences in my life that I want my present and future descendants to be aware of. The main purpose for writing this story is to enable them to better understand this ever-changing world and to provide them with data they can compare with the trials and tribulations they will face on a daily basis. To know that a particular feeling, emotion, or experience is natural or commonplace rather than a world-shaking episode should be reassuring to all of them. For members of my family who understand me, I believe this explanation is sufficient. To those who don't, no amount of words would be sufficient.

The brain accesses your life memories, and I don't have the slightest idea how. For example, this morning, I was driving to the dentist, and I passed for at least the 10,000th time the two houses my father once owned as an investment. They were two-family houses, located next door to each other. For whatever reason, when I looked at them today, as I always do when I am passing by, it was completely different. I suddenly visualized my grandfather, dressed in his bib overalls, pushing that cart that he had built when I was about 10 years old. That one-of-a-kind pushcart had a storage bin for paints, cans with nails and bolts, hammers, brushes, scrapers, putty cans, and other miscellaneous construction items. Ladders were laid across the top, with rags hanging down from them. Tagging behind my grandfather were several of my brothers and me to provide him with the "boy-power" to accomplish his repair work. We all wore work clothes, and none of us looked forward to the day. The sun would be non-stop scorching, and this outdoor work would be tedious, time-consuming, and never-ending. But under my grandfather's guidance we were able to keep those two houses in fairly good shape.

A much better responsibility is associated with those homes a few years later. Each month, the rent had to be collected from the four tenants. It wasn't a lot of money, but each tenant had to be given a receipt after paying cash. I did my share of rent collections and always brought my most polite manners with me. Tenants rarely

turned down an 11-year-old boy, and I took my responsibility very seriously. The final step was to return home and turn everything over to my mother. I was always very proud of being able to undertake that responsibility. Why did this story pass through my mind today, and not on other occasions?

Twenty-three years ago, I penned two books in honor of my ancestors, in which I tried to capture some of our family's history with a large emphasis from my point of view. I will try not to repeat the information that appeared in those two self-published works because they are available for those who may wish to reminisce. They are entitled, "The First One-Hundred Years in America, Recollections of a Lebanese American Grandson," and "The First One-Hundred Years In America, Other Voices." In rereading both books, I am sadly aware that most of the people I wrote about have passed away.

I need to emphasize that the people I had written about two decades ago are gone. They have passed away, depriving our world of many exceptional people. As I was nearing completion of this third book and culled down the photographs from several thousand to about 110, I realized nearly every person I wrote about has left us or in most cases are in their '80s or '90s.

Yes, thankfully there are many of their descendants to represent them in future years, and for that I am elated. I'm in the process of passing my personal torch to my wonderful three children, 8 grandchildren, and even a great grandchild! How fortunate I am that I've lived enough years to watch each of them spread their wings and fly to their destinies. I couldn't be better rewarded or fulfilled.

I am left with only photographs or memories of my many interviews with these lovely people. Whereas I tried to research dates and arrivals in America in those two volumes to provide a framework for how the family fit into the evolving world they now found themselves residing, in this volume I am focusing on specific events or occurrences that transpired during my journey. While in this book I have tried to avoid duplicating the material in those first books, it

has been necessary to repeat some of the information to give context for the current reader.

I am somewhat disappointed when I'm told that one of my books, sometimes signed, is sold on one of the available platforms like eBay. Altogether, I had printed about 1,000 copies of each volume. I never sold or accepted money for my copies because these books were written as a tribute to my ancestors. I didn't want them or their extraordinary efforts to be overlooked or forgotten. I realize I can't control the actions of those who sold copies of the books and wish to profit by it. The book that I am currently writing will be handled by me in the same manner and, as I previously said, copies will be provided for my children and their offspring.

Before we get further along this journey, let's review how we got here. In almost every immigrant's mind is the dream, the hope, the promise of an improved lifestyle that provides money, food, housewares, and abundant inexpensive homes. Their imaginations are fueled by snippets of information they glean from those who have traveled abroad and tasted some of those sought-after rewards. America is one of these great lands of opportunity. However, too often another part of the story is rarely played out. The stories that explain that along with this golden highway to success sometimes events occur that disrupt the journey. There are often bumps in the road. Sometimes there are people who help you overcome these barriers to success, and sometimes there are not. Anywhere along the way, in an instant, your almost-fulfilled dream can be shattered, and rendered beyond reach.

One could say the story had its beginnings in the late 1890s when my paternal grandmother Lizzie sold her jewelry to pay off the gambling debts of my soon-to-be grandfather Norman in order to entice him to the nearest altar. This event took place in a small village not far from Beirut, Lebanon, one of those war-torn Mediterranean countries that had been made to feel like a ping pong ball for too many decades. Could she have ever dreamed that the birth of her only child, my father Joseph, in 1899 in Nibeh, was to begin the

chain of events which led to that fateful day in late 1953 in Cranford, New Jersey, U.S.A?

The impoverished couple had many long soul-searching conversations about how they should “roll the dice” to decide the path to a future. They were excited by the countless stories related by their several neighbors who had returned from their “gold hunt” in America to announce that jobs and money were plentiful. Tamping down their exuberance was the knowledge that they were illiterate in Arabic, could not speak or understand the English language, and had practically no money.

America was oceans away and they heatedly discussed these seemingly insurmountable barriers facing them. Lizzie pointed out that although the language would be an equal challenge to both of them, she would have an advantage in obtaining the financial backing for that extensive trip. Her relative George had been living in Oneonta, New York, and had established a dry goods enterprise there. He used his limited finances to successfully underwrite immigrants as salesmen – peddlers to hawk their household wares throughout the vast Upstate New York. That’s where thousands of farmers were eager to obtain these so-called dry goods to improve the lives of their expanding families. It was immigrant workers who were filling these needs by traversing freezing cold communities with those sought-after necessities.

Most of the peddlers carried their heavy packs on their backs. Some had horses and buggies. And only very few had the luxury of those early jalopies which often weren’t as reliable as one’s strong back. In almost all cases, the peddlers would successfully plead with the farmers to be able to spend the night in the not-so-freezing barns with the animals.

George grew his business by providing the numerous qualified immigrants with the fare to come to America, their first backpack of goods to take on the road, and a small amount of cash to see them through their first trip. He knew that Lizzie was smart, trustworthy, and hard-working. That’s why it was Lizzie, not Norman, who embarked on that

frightening journey to America while Norman stayed in his parents' small house, caring for his toddler son Joseph. In most similar situations, it was the male who made that challenging trip and the wife and children who stayed behind to wait for him to send them enough money to enable other family members to join him.

What was Lizzie's America like? How did she handle the unknown factors that were always present? Some elderly relatives have provided stories since my childhood, and a bit of research has helped me fill in the rest. I know that she didn't travel on the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, or Normandy. It actually was just one nondescript, refitted cargo ship, which was reconfigured to berth as many passengers as possible. The immigrants were shoe-horned into the several deck levels to ensure the greatest financial reward to the ship's owners. During the early part of the voyage, the ship usually made port in Marseilles or Greece to obtain fresh food and other necessary supplies. Once they cleared these nearby land masses, the ship had smooth sailing to Ellis Island, New York, U.S.A. – a mere ocean away.

I can only imagine what the conditions were like aboard ship for these frightened passengers when it came to eating, sleeping, attending to their natural bodily functions, etc., in that overcrowded ship...all the while plowing through that vast ocean toward their destination. Twenty years earlier, other immigrants traveling on a similar ship had written the following: "Those strange cushions hanging at the foot of each bed probably had some kind of sanitary purpose. They took those life preservers with them each time they went to the shared bathroom. They were convinced that these round open forms should be placed on the toilet seats to prevent contact with other people's germs. Finally, a fellow Arabic-speaking passenger explained the error to everyone's hilarious delight!"

I can imagine Lizzie's trip, as over 50 years later in 1954, I sailed in a crowded Army troopship from California to Japan while serving in the military. And it was more than miserable because it seemed that voyage would never end! There is no description I can give of the stinking sickening stench that wafted throughout the lower decks

where we were quartered! I vividly recall announcing to anyone who would listen when we disembarked in Yokohama Bay: "I will NEVER return home by ship....I will walk first!" (I returned...equally miserable...by ship several years later.)

However, Lizzie endured and survived. She eventually arrived at Ellis Island, having left the security of the environment she had grown up in, knew and understood, and where people understood her. This five foot, 90-pound, 20-year-old was a tough lady, courageous, a risk-taker, driven to succeed, with enough confidence to believe that she could make it alone. From the time she landed at Ellis Island for 18 months of hard work, she was very much alone...except for the warmth of those barns.

It began when she finally arrived in Oneonta, her cousin George gave her a brief but happy welcome, outfitted her with a heavy backpack of household goods and sent her on her way to sell those goods to the eagerly awaiting farm communities. She proved to be very successful, and when her supplies were depleted, quickly returned to Oneonta for a refill and to trek out in a different direction. Eighteen months later in 1901, she had the pleasure of welcoming her husband Norman and now two-and-a-half-year-old son Joseph to Oneonta to begin the family's new life in America. They had traveled by ship as she had done, and most likely had their own tales to share with Lizzie about the challenges of that voyage.

Norman purchased a horse and wagon, stabled on West Broadway in Oneonta, which was to be their home base. They moved into one of the units of "The Beehive," populated by many other immigrants who had arrived in America to make their fortune. Most of them came for financial reasons, but some came for political reasons. Now that Lizzie had more reliable transportation and Norman's strength to support her on the route, she was able to expand the territory they covered and increase her income. She handled the sales end of the business while Norman's primary role was wagon-driver, caring for, stabling, grooming the horse and maintaining the wagon. They both worked endlessly towards achieving their long-term goal

of making as much money as possible and saving it in the money belt Lizzie would wear for the rest of her life. Their dream was to eventually return to Nibeh to live the remainder of their lives. During the first few years, Lizzie boarded Joseph with the most well-liked and trusted farm family so that she and her husband could concentrate on the demanding work of traveling on the route.

Fate stepped in some years later, and Lizzie made a swift change, which scrambled the lifestyles of the threesome. One day, as she and Norman began driving away from the farm where Joseph was boarded, she saw him run into the arms of the farmer's wife and loudly address her as "mother." Lizzie told Norman to stop the horse and wagon, jumped off and took young Joseph by the hand to the farmer's home. She helped him gather up all his belongings into a small suitcase and walked him to the buggy. Over the loud protests of the farmer's wife, who offered to keep him free of charge, the family drove away, never to return to that farm. Joseph never boarded anywhere ever again!

I really don't know how they managed the next years unless they took him on the route with them. What I do know is that he eventually attended school in Oneonta, graduated at 16, and his records showed that, like his father Norman, he worked for the Delaware & Hudson (D&H) Railroad. I was told by several relatives and friends that Joseph was extremely intelligent. A local doctor had offered to my grandmother to send him to college and medical school. The influential doctor also said he was sure that with the help of his friend, the Congressman, he could get him an appointment to West Point. Lizzie thanked him but explained that the family would be heading back to their home in Lebanon.

Based on information from relatives over the years, I was led to some Oneonta City records and learned more about my ancestors. It seems that many immigrant families lived in that odd-looking, low rent building I told you about, The Beehive, on West Broad Street. The many small apartments closely connected gave the appearance of a beehive. Lizzie, Norman, and Joseph lived for many years in one of

those tiny units. During this time Joseph fell in love with a girl who was a neighbor living close by on West Broadway. Her name was Susie H. Monser, she worked in the silk mill, and records show her father as Hasham and her mother as F. (maiden name George). Joseph spent much of his time trying to be with her when not on his late shift at the railroad yards. It was not long before Susie reciprocated his feelings, and the young lovers became inseparable and decided to marry. They were married on April 8, 1917, in New York City. The witnesses to the marriage were Joseph's aunt and uncle, Norman's sister Tekala and his brother Bshara. Susie was 18, but since Joseph was 17, his parents Norman and Lizzie were required to sign their consent. Syrian Catholic priest The Reverend Abraham Rechenate performed the ceremony.

Lizzie determined that the now-expanded family would eventually return to the Middle East. Sadly, Susie died some time shortly after their marriage and the conjecture is that she was one of the many millions of victims who died of the pandemic of that time, called the Spanish flu. What we do know is that she was not listed in the 1920 Census as living in the household that comprised Norman as head, Lizzie as his wife, Joseph as his son, Charlie (Bshara) as his brother, and Bertha as his sister-in-law. My friend Katie Monser Kaufman, who is now in her late 90s, recently told me that to her knowledge the Hasham Monser family were not related to her or the Illius Monsers, who were great friends of my family.

That painful episode dampened any talk of returning to Lebanon, and Lizzie realized that she had to do something to change that bleak picture. With the loss of her only son's beloved wife, Lizzie was faced with a mother's nightmare: How to help her grieving son retrieve his thirst for a rewarding life and hope for his future? This strong-willed lady would not be deterred. She had recently been told by visiting relatives that the state of Ohio had been attracting workers, with its burgeoning silk mill industry. She immediately made plans to distract Joseph's mind from the loss of his beautiful mate by relocating the family to Akron, Ohio, which was going through a hiring spree

to populate its silk mills. She told Joseph that they would become involved in a “very prosperous beginning,” and he needed to make plans to drive the family part-way across the country. They drove out to Ohio in my father’s first sedan, which now became the family’s primary transportation mode. Because he had inherited Lizzie’s keen mind, Joseph was able to master the skill of a silk mill operator and flourish in his work. After Joseph toiled in those silk mills for nearly three years, helping to fatten Lizzie’s money belt, she decided now was the time for the family to return to Lebanon.

So they began making plans to return east to New York City, where they would embark for the final leg of their journey back to Lebanon. Their plan was to stop in Cranford, New Jersey, 20 miles away from New York City, and stay for a few weeks with Norman’s sister, Tekala, who lived alone in an apartment. In August 1921, prior to leaving Akron, they had dinner with their best friend, Joe, who shocked their senses when, midway through the meal, he pulled a large Luger pistol from his jacket and slammed it down on the dinner table. Joe had been drinking Arak, a powerful liquor often referred to as “white lightning” because of its strength and was feeling its effects. He gave the gun to 22-year-old Joseph, saying through somewhat slurred words: “I got this pistol from a dead soldier when I was in France a few years ago, and brought it home with me. I am entrusting it to you so you can protect your mother and her fat money belt on your trip back to Lebanon. Take good care of it and someday, when you don’t need it anymore, I’ll come and get it back.” For the next 30 years, Joe would telephone my father Joseph...always at 2:00 a.m., always half-intoxicated, and ask him if the Luger was safely in his possession. I can’t tell you the number of times he phoned, but I’ll never forget the sight of my sleepy father in those morning hours, sitting in his underwear on a kitchen chair, patiently reassuring the other “Joe” that the gun was safe and being carefully taken care of, and was being kept for him. My four brothers and I, in the next bedrooms, would laugh and laugh after being awakened by that nocturnal ring. We never met Joe, but he was a

legend of our childhood! I'll finish the story of what became of that Luger later in this book.

Lizzie, Norman, and Joseph drove back east and moved in with Tekala on Winans Avenue in Cranford. When checking New York City overseas shipping schedules, the threesome realized it would be some time before they could complete the difficult travel arrangements. Grandfather Norman purchased a new horse and wagon, and young Joseph landed a job in Shaheen's Silk Mill. This bright young man applied all that he had learned about the workings of a silk mill and soon became a foreman in a Plainfield, New Jersey, mill. During the period 1921 – 1926, the threesome kept delaying their plans to return to the Middle East, while they prospered in their work both at the silk mill and in their now-established route with Lizzie and Norman's latest horse and wagon doing the hard work.

In the mid-1920s, Joseph heard of Philip and Anna Sopp and their lovely daughters, who lived in Homer, New York. Lizzie had been pressing him about marrying again, so he began his search with a six-hour trip, 220 miles from Cranford to Homer. By 1926, he had selected his bride-to-be, Esther, the 17-year-old eldest child of the Sopps of Homer. After Esther accepted his proposal, Lizzie hired a fleet of Cranford taxi cabs to drive close relatives to Homer for the wedding. They returned to Cranford to move into their larger new apartment on Winans Avenue, where the family had relocated after staying with Norman's sister Tekala for several years. This larger apartment allowed them to accommodate more people, and that's where the week-long wedding celebration was held. Accompanying the Cranford entourage back from Homer were Esther's kid sister Margaret and first cousin Jenny, both very pretty girls, there to lend her moral support for this move to Winans Avenue, which was just a dirt road, years away from becoming paved. The wedding celebration continued for a full week, as people went to their jobs, and then returned home to resume the celebration. On a humorous note, Margaret and Jenny were so popular with the young males on Winans Avenue that a few who didn't want the girls to return to Homer

one night climbed into a back bedroom window and stole all of their clothes! They had to borrow some from Esther for the return trip to Homer.

All during this decade, Joseph had less and less desire to return to his birthplace. So, he gently filled Lizzie's head – as she was the decision maker – with details of the many stories being told by visitors from Lebanon who complained about the harsh living conditions, difficult times, failing crops, lack of opportunity and losing their land to the government. He would say to her: "Could we lose all the money we worked so hard for?" And Lizzie would nervously rub her hands over her bulging money belt.

Lizzie apparently took heed of her son's concerns and in 1928, she purchased three lots across the street for \$1800. I am sure Joseph breathed a deep sigh of relief, as he and Norman, over the next two years, subcontracted work to build the family home, the three-story, three-family house I live in today, some 95 years later. In 1930 they moved into this permanent home, where all those wonderful elders who have since passed away, raised five sons who have followed the paths that Fate decreed. Along the way, we also lost our oldest brother who died at 9 of rheumatic fever.

By 1939, our family was now composed of my grandparents, parents, and five sons living in the new 90 Winans Avenue home. Let's look more closely at our lifestyle.

As I reflect on those early decades, the extremely hot summers and runny noses, winters hardened our resolve to not only survive but to actually enjoy the excessive climate swings. No matter the temperature, we played until dark each day, only to be ordered in by a tough grandmother or concerned mother. About that concerned mother. I wasn't old enough to step back and try to understand what she was going through in a new environment. In Homer, as the eldest of five children, she was placed in charge while my Sitto Tommy, her mother, worked at Wickwire in nearby Cortland. From comments one of my aunts told me late in her life, my mother's younger siblings didn't appreciate her being able to give orders to them. So at the age

of 18, she went from being somewhat of a nanny to her four siblings to being the chief cook and bottle washer in the Hobbie household. Take a quick look at what followed my first Christmas on December 25, 1931, when I was six months old. Imagine at that time, my brother Ernie was 19 months old, my older brother Mike was 3 years old, and the late (“Marhoum”) Eddie was five! My mother, Essie, was 23 years old. My father, Joseph, was 32, and my grandparents Norman (Giddo) and Lizzie (Sitto) were 52 and 53, respectively. And in those days, disposable diapers were unheard of.

Each of us had a Winans Avenue buddy, who was always sought out to play our fictional sports hero in our never-losing championship games. In reality, this constant repetition of make-believe baseball games, guided by street manhole-cover bases, helped several of us to achieve limited...or in the case of my youngest brother...exceptional pitching success when later competing in our respective school baseball teams. The same could be said about all of my siblings who dedicated endless hours on the basketball court built by our father and grandfather in the middle of their vast vegetable garden. The elders’ wisdom in building that court enabled many of us to eventually partially pay for our college educations. In fact, my 82-year-old brother, who passed away in 2012, took to basketball, learned the basic points of the game, and was recognized as “The Shot Doctor” by Sports Illustrated magazine. He also became the most adept golfer among my siblings having mastered the game by studying the exceptional golfers at Echo Lake Country Club, where we caddied.

In my own case, playing cards at a very young age helped me learn how to deal with others throughout each phase of my life. Like sports, it opened doors to coping with people in many situations. Playing whist with the elders beginning when I was about 12 or 13 established the basics for all the later years of card playing, I had watched the adults carefully and began filling in as the “fourth” when they were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the next adult. I learned how to be strategic and to acquire the many verbal and nonverbal aspects of card playing. This experience led to almost all the future

card games: rummy, poker, pinochle, bridge, etc. I learned it was fun winning, so I became a focused student on learning all aspects of card-playing.

I played cards with other groups throughout my life, and some events stand out in my memory when I was away at Davis & Elkins College. I recall two such events. Two of the “rich” kids asked me to play three-handed poker with them. (That’s rare. Usually there are 5 – 7 guys in a poker game.) They wanted to embarrass me because the girlfriend of one of them had a crush on me. Their plan was to gang up on me and then divide their winnings. After a few hands, I realized what they were doing, so from then on, I’d drop out when I had a poor hand, and I’d raise them when I had a good hand. After a few hours, I had most of their money and they left angry, confused, and frustrated. You’ll be happy to know, that girlfriend ended up marrying the young man and they lived a long and happy life together.

The other event occurred at Davis & Elkins Carriage House, the dorm where the GI veterans, 5 years older than most of us, lived. They used to tease me because I was the champion poker player on lower campus: How come I didn’t play against the “Big Guys” in the Carriage House? One day I accepted their challenge and played with them. I broke even after a few hours, but it wasn’t fun because they played for high stakes (which I couldn’t afford), and I suspected there was a little ganging up on me based on some illogical betting. I never played there again because I didn’t want to risk the money I was sure to get by playing with classmates who resided on lower campus. I would always turn down the older poker players with a smile, saying, “I’m just a young country boy who can’t afford the rich stakes of you wealthy professionals.” We would all laugh, but I never played with that group again. I stayed with my small but steady income.

While at Davis & Elkins, as part of my basketball scholarship, I washed blackboards and swept out classrooms as a grant-in-aid. The years in Elkins, West Virginia, were part of my growing up and learning about the real world. I wrote sports articles for the local newspaper, “The Elkins Intermountain,” and was paid ten cents an inch

for my efforts. Between playing poker and writing sports for their very accomplished high school teams, I was able to subsist with only writing home for money when things got desperate. Even though the free training table provided food for the basketball players, the food choices were not usually to my liking. I supplemented the little food that I could tolerate with a couple of store-bought hamburgers in an Elkins eatery. I was a frequent visitor to those small dining establishments thanks to my poker winnings and my occasional check for sports writing. Thankfully the high school teams were very successful. The editor would cut my articles down if I went on too long covering their losses!

Another time my card-playing experience helped me was a few years later when I was on a troopship going to Japan. Three of my friends in CIC (the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps) were trying to find a fourth for bridge and couldn't. They decided I was the most "teachable" and "drafted" me to be the fourth. When we started to play, they were surprised and thought perhaps I had lied to them because it was almost like playing whist, which I had learned playing with the adults. When I explained it to them, they understood.

Years later, my wife and I became involved in several local bridge groups, which enabled us to meet new friends and enjoy their company.

Throughout my adult life, I have been part of poker groups, which have always proved to be fun and memorable. Most of the time we would rotate hosting the events, and the host would supply the food for the six- or seven-man group. The banter and eating sometimes were more enjoyable than the game itself. I no longer participate in the occasional poker games which are held at the Jersey Shore because I have difficulty seeing while driving home at night. The games are about one hour away. My interest in poker has been transferred to the TV screen where I often watch various tournaments, constantly second-guessing the strategy employed by some of the players.

I leave you on this subject but not before I tell you about the one card trick I learned when I was 9 years old. I have you pick a card

from the deck and give it back to me. I put my hands behind my back, maintaining eye contact with you, and place the card at the front of the deck facing out. I then extend the deck in front of me, facing you so that you see a card at the bottom of the deck while I am now looking at the card you selected because it's facing me at the top of the deck. While you're looking at the wrong card and I'm eyeballing the card you selected, I ask you, "Is this your card?" You say "no" because it's just some card at the bottom of the deck. As you're saying "no" to the card facing you, I am looking at the card you selected which is facing me. I return my hands behind my back, reverse the card you selected so it's facing in the same direction as the rest of the deck, and insert it anywhere into the deck. Then I bring my hands in front and after shuffling the cards thoroughly, I sort through them in front of you until I get to the card you selected. Mandrake the Magician strikes again!

In addition to my unique interest in the challenge of playing cards, I grew up with the same interest as my cohorts on Winans Avenue and in Cranford. I learned to flip baseball and war cards (of Japanese and Germans during World War II), shoot marbles and logged in many hours to become proficient enough to win these collectibles from other kids...and would sell these valuable items back to them at bargain-store prices. This was one of the early ways I learned to obtain money to purchase those things that most of my friends in smaller families could easily afford. It also felt very good to do so without asking my elders for their money because I was very aware that every one of them was working long, hard hours to support our family of 9. That understanding never left me, even when I was attending college in later years.

Bike riding was a major activity. Interestingly, I can vividly recall pumping away all over town with local friends and newly acquired ones as I moved from grammar school to Junior High School, covering a vast amount of territory. But I cannot visualize one of the bicycles, which were all very dear to me. I do know that my father's and grandfather's repair work kept them running, and none of them

ever looked new. They were always in some state of repair to provide me with a few more months of “wheels.” I can’t even remember a color or model. What I do remember is the last time I rode a bicycle. It was in the early 1970s, and my wife and family and I were living in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was one of my sons’ bike, and I was trying to keep in shape by riding several miles every evening. I made the mistake of peddling along the side of a major highway. It was getting dark, and the cars were buzzing by at a high speed. I heard horns blaring at me, and I felt I was going to be hit momentarily, so I threw myself and the bike off the highway onto a lawn. I wasn’t hurt, but I was shook because I felt I was almost run over, and have not ridden a bike since.

The treats of those early days were the sweet sticks of gum that came with your baseball and war cards. I also loved gumdrops, licorice, apricots, and soft chocolate bars...all those tasty sweets that ensured the local dentist would live well and thrive.

For a few years between 9 and 12, along with my next older brother, I sang in the Episcopal Church choir. It involved several evenings of practice each week, and a few services on Sunday. Caddying at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield also was a source of earning spending money. I even delivered newspapers for a few years. However, Junior High School basketball competed with the religious period of my life, and dreams of heroics on the hardwood replaced the quest for eventual ascension to an unknown “heaven.” Remarkably, several of my siblings and nephews managed to be involved in both choir and caddying, often leading the church choir procession as acolytes every Sunday.

We had our share of dogs growing up. One of the best was a collie, Jackie. Unfortunately, she got too involved in a neighboring street’s garbage pail, creating messes, and we suspect, was poisoned accidentally or on purpose. Our grandfather buried Jackie in a far corner of our property, but the exact location is no longer part of my memory. In my junior and senior years of high school, my dog “Isa” was my personal comfort blanket, and while he helped me through

some bleak days, in later years my grandparents provided most of his care. He ended his days chasing animals for an unknown farmer in southern New Jersey. Later, my children had a Cairn terrier when we lived in Greensboro. More about her in a later chapter.

One of the coolest jobs I had was being playground director at a large playground in Scotch Plains, NJ. I had over 300 children of all ages attending the park for the 2 years before I went into the Service. I learned a lot about how to organize my time, and how to gain and maintain the attention of the attendees. I also learned how to delegate responsibility for the various ages ranging from 5 – 15. For example, I knew the older girls really enjoyed taking care of the younger kids, and with the older boys I found if I played with them in their activity for a little while to get them started I could go off to another venue to work with other kids.

My siblings and I were all male. However, my first cousin Laura, daughter of Margaret, my mother's younger sister, was always close to us, and I recall my Dad telling us one summer vacation, "Treat her well, She's like a sister to you." He was right, and up until her passing in her 80s a number of years ago, we followed his wonderful advice. Laura shocked me when she left me \$500 in her will, which is a reflection of how close we were during our lives. I used the money to buy a gold locket for her surviving daughter, Dee. It contains photographs of Laura and Dee's late sister, Jan. Each year, Dee reminds me how precious it is to her.

The Lebanese dialect spoken by my Hobbie grandparents and my bi-lingual parents often had different audiences. We all grew up with a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I completely understood both sets of adults but had difficulty answering them in kind. Nevertheless, a message going to or from them could never be lost... perhaps the nonverbals that accompanied the words helped to clarify the meaning.

Both my parents focused on our education and made sure we understood the importance of doing our homework and concentrating on learning. They accepted our sports activity, but only as an

afterthought of receiving a first-class education. My father's voice will always ring in my ears as I heard him comment on my good report card. "It's a good card, but why aren't they all A's?"

As a child, I used to enjoy a few board games like Monopoly and Parchesi. Much later in my life, I learned to play Scrabble with some friends and fell in love with words. During the pandemic years, I improvised a solitary version of it, whereby I played two independent hands or sets of tiles. I enjoy it immensely and successfully honed my word skills while playing. I always feel a great sense of satisfaction at the end of every game and am never bored. But I enjoyed pinball machines even more so. I think the sound that was made as the ball ricocheted from one side to the other added to that pleasure. My "Uncle" Fred (the husband of my mother's first cousin) in Cortland, NY, at his bar/restaurant, The Lehigh Hotel, had the best pinball machine because it accepted a lot of pushing by the player before "tilting," and shutting down. After the first dime, you could win enough free games to play endlessly...or until I became bored. Then I'd go to the back kitchen, fish out a few hot dogs, put them in buns, add his special-tasting sauce and/or raw onions. All that was left was to dig out an ice-cold bottle of soda from the large chest filled with them floating on chunks of ice and water. I still can savor that delicious taste. And I can feel Uncle Fred's hand on the back of my head saying, "Eat all you want, Sonny," as he smiled encouragingly at me. I loved that man so much.

My mother Esther was the one to make sure our childhood birthdays were celebrated. I loved the candles and balloons but soon outgrew that interest. She always baked a cake with a lot of icing on it. We were "spanked" by the attendees for the same number of times as was our age. And then there was an extra one to grow on. The first real party I attended as a guest was when I was in 7th grade. It was near the Canoe Club in Cranford. There were about 16 of us. Essie was very excited about me going and fussed over me to get properly dressed for the occasion. I think it took on a big meaning for her because it was a "North Side" family – a rich one. At one point we were

seated four at a table, two boys and two girls, waiting for cookies and milk. The mother of the hostess, my classmate, went from table to table with quart bottles of milk to fill our glasses. In those days, milk came in glass quart bottles covered with flip-top cardboard lids. The top inch or so was thick with cream, so that the bottle had to be shaken to mix the contents. Each of us sat waiting for the milk to get to our table, and I recall still being a little nervous and in awe of my surroundings. When she came to my table, she grabbed a new quart, pulled off the cardboard top, licked the cream off it, put it back on, shook the bottle so everything got mixed, opened it and began filling the glasses in front of us. I put my hand over the top of my glass and sheepishly told her I wasn't thirsty. And when she insisted, I told her I didn't want to waste the milk. She gave me a weird look and moved on. Other than my mother the next day, I never told anyone about that story.

I never was concerned about my clothes. It seems to me that almost all of my clothes were brother Ernie hand me downs. Ironically, after Ernie passed away at 83 in 2013, his extensive and tasteful wardrobe was given to me by his widow, Jan, and son Jon. So both as a child and as an elderly person most of my clothes were provided by Ernie. My wardrobe is not new, but it is extensive. I think most of the adult clothes originated with Ernie's oldest son Jeff, who is an exceptional dresser. Supplementing that trove are warm jackets and coats provided by my three children, who want to make sure Dad is warm and comfortable in his apparel. All the years I was going to business, I wore a suit or sports jacket. Prior to that in college, I lived in sweat-shirts, dungarees, sweaters, and moccasins or loafers. When working, if I was scheduled to give a talk anywhere, I wore what I considered my best clothes; if it was a rainy day, I wore the most comfortable, least attractive clothes. When I taught in Western Electric's Speakers Bureau or at three colleges in NJ, I was most comfortable wearing mock turtle necks.

I want to talk about a few more memorable events in this beginning chapter. One was my father's words about appreciating all that

we have been given and not to envy what it appears someone else has. There are a few notable examples in my life, but one of the harshest ones involved an athlete from nearby Hillside High School. I was thinking about the life lesson that it taught me. Phil was about 6'4", 220 pounds, dark-haired and good-looking. He was the powerful, high-scoring center on the basketball team, the unstoppable fullback on the football team, and the fastball-throwing, unhittable pitcher on the baseball team. Phil was all county, perhaps all state, in several of those sports. I used to envy his physique and wanted to trade my skinny body for his. Later on in his life, I either was told or read that while earning spending money tending bar a robbery took place. A panicked gunman fired a shot and Phil received a bullet in his spine that paralyzed him from the waist down. That powerful athlete was relegated to a wheelchair some time in his early 20s. A few years later, I was working at Western Electric Kearny, and a co-worker from Hillside told me that Phil had passed away. I was in my late 20s at the time, and today at the age of 94 I realize how lucky I was not to trade places with Phil. I have been absolutely thrilled at the life I was given, with the recipient of all these wonderful years. Envy no one!

The other event was my overwhelming reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and then years later the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They fueled my interest in learning all about the war that I could. Today I am transfixed by reading both fiction and non-fiction accounts of what occurred prior to, between, and after those two historical events. Somehow, it seemed that the war lasted much, much longer to a 10- to 14-year-old who carefully watched his father's analysis of the European and Asian maps, which daily appeared in many newspapers. It felt good to watch Hitler's and Tojo's empires recede until they were no more. During the 1941-1945 world conflict, I always felt a sense of doom.

Some years later, I experienced a similar feeling when I was visiting a Western Electric manufacturing plant in the Midwest to run a Speakers Bureau class. The weather had suddenly changed dramatically, and the clouds darkened in midday. The wind began blowing

fiercely, and I was certain that the large glass window pane at the entrance of the plant would break. But it didn't. What amazed me was that, although I felt a sense of doom, the employees went about their duties and never even discussed the impending weather. I was shook-up, but at the plant, the people took it in stride because they were used to it. I assure you, I didn't like it at all and was happy to leave at the end of the day.

One of the greatest attractions in my life is the New Jersey Shore. I could never get enough time enjoying the sun, the sand, and the salt water. At each stage of my life, even though I was a poor swimmer, I challenged the ocean by soaking in it, riding the waves, and just cavorting in that playground. Several summers I worked as a dishwasher and busboy in Seaside Heights, NJ. Later, with my wife and children, we vacationed in Manasquan, Point Pleasant, Long Beach Island, and other nearby beach towns. I believe my three children have thrived in those very same settings. Needless to say, that we inherited my father's love of the ocean. As a very good man, though, he deferred to my mother, who disliked the sand and pleaded with him to build a mountain vacation home. That's why he built her the Pennsylvania lodge on Stillwater Lake.

In closing this first chapter, I want to describe a sad scene I experienced on the way home from shopping recently. I came into my street from the opposite way I usually come. In doing so, I stopped on Meeker Avenue at Paul DiLorenzo's old house. In my first book, I related that Del had told me how his father personally built this small house of a few rooms and very little electricity. His brother and four or five sisters were crowded into those sparse quarters but enjoyed their exciting childhood there. Paul and his wife Bess and I used to have long discussions on their side lawn. He was proud of his prolific and well-organized garden behind his house. He often went hunting and hung the deer that he had bagged onto a large tree next to his garage, probably to drain them. He had offered me venison, but it was not to my liking. Anyway, today, late March 2025, I stopped the car because the house was being rebuilt. All the memories of the

late Paul and his family living there for all those years swept through me, and I choked up. He and Bess were a very fine couple, and they are sorely missed. For their house to be physically reconfigured accentuates that loss! Several large apartment houses have now replaced Dell's family home.



My loving family in the early 1960s: The men, left to right: Eddie, Pop, Ernie, Bobby, myself. Essie and Sitto in the front.

Chapter 2:

The Influencers

After reflecting on a number of memories and events during various periods of my life, let's make a brief visit with the six people who influenced me the most during my childhood and teenage years. Foremost were my parents. Remember I've already written extensively about them in my 2003 and 2005 books. I just want to toss in a few events that have remained prominently in my mind. They illustrate a combination of specific events and the lasting impact that parents have on their children.

My Father, Joseph Norman Hobbie

My father was kind and also one of a kind. He was extremely intelligent, wise, frugal, patriotic, caring, family-oriented, hardworking, and one of the finest persons I have known in my life. In addition to his full-time sales route of household dry goods, he fulfilled just about every repairman role one would hire in the year 2025. Everything revolved around him, and he filled the role of mayor, judge, jury, policeman, and counselor in our family of nine. We all worked hard to gain his much sought-after approval.

In later years, when I was raising my own family, he always spoke collectively about solving problems. For example, "We have to dig a trench around your foundation so you won't keep getting water in your basement." I especially enjoy two very different events that involved him, ranging from my early teens to my late thirties. One day Pop was repairing the washing machine on the floor of our cellar as I, maybe 13/14 years old, was holding the flashlight so he could see the small parts. He told me to watch so I could learn, but I was more interested in him finishing so I could go back outside and join the other kids playing. Whenever he fixed anything, he would focus on that object the same way my 3- or 4-year-old

son Gregg would stare at the machinery that made the merry-go-round turn instead of looking at the wooden horse he was riding on. Gregg would once in a while give a perfunctory glance or smile at his mother and me.

The second memory was when I was at his Stillwater Lake, PA, house walking the path from his house to the swimming area. Two 17/18-year-old pretty girls in shorts walked past us, going the opposite way. Without turning around (for the first time in my life) he commented in a matter-of-fact kind of way that most men and boys would notice. Pop told his 37-year-old son, "Those girls are certainly very attractive." As we kept walking, looking straight ahead, I replied, "Yes, they are," hiding my smiling face away from him. Somehow I felt I had arrived that my very proper father would share that sentiment man-to-man.

I like to remember the many words my father used to help guide us through the turbulent waters of life. Often he gave messages to carefully explore the realistic goals in your life, then plan a course that enables you to have the best opportunities to achieve them. Although I have tried his approach, it's often very difficult. My own analysis usually comes up short in trying to be introspective; I think the following may be closer to my reality. My father, through his wisdom, trustworthiness and compassion, became the patriarch of the neighborhood and our entire extended family. People naturally came to him for advice. And he even served as a leader in more official capacities. He was the street warden during World War II, and at his church he was a leading vestryman.

I've always been curious to find answers about anything and everything...always inquisitive. I have many of my parents' characteristics. I'm sensitive like Essie was when she was younger. A reader, a speller, and somewhat of a "neat freak." Although I often fail to be like my father, I have his work ethic, and I am compassionate like him. I am told I have my mother's eyes and I used to have slender fingers like my father's before Raynaud's disease and a screwed-up neck ruined my hands. And I notice as I age many other traits that

are not easy to cope with. I'm finding that in these later years I try to go with the flow.

When anyone asks me if I believed in Santa Claus, I usually evaded the question because I knew my father was Santa. Even though I never saw a figure place gifts under our annual tree, I knew in my heart his name was Joseph N. Hobbie, my father.

My father and grandfather teamed up to help our neighbor and dear friend Sadie Kiamie and her family. She was working very hard in her cold basement sewing kimonos. After my grandfather installed a pot-bellied stove to warm the cellar, my Dad took the kimonos on his route, sold them for Sadie, and gave her the proceeds. This is just one example of how my father – and his father – cared for others.

I loved Sunday mornings, when his ritual was to occupy the bathroom for a long time. He took a bath, and then after getting partially dressed, shaved in front of the mirror using the old-fashioned straight razor. I would watch him from the bathroom door. I loved the sound of his whiskers being cut in the complete silence of that bathroom. To this day, I stare at that large hook adjacent to the mirror where his sharpening strap hung. When he was finished, he would wipe off the excess shaving cream with a towel, finish dressing, and emerge from the bathroom for his favorite Sunday dinner, corned beef and cabbage, which he referred to as a boiled dinner. He enjoyed loading his plate and then taking his time to savor every forkful. He really loved that meal!

My father rarely embarrassed me, but he did at least three times. The first was at a New York Giants baseball game at the New York Polo Grounds. He bought two tickets, one for himself and one for his five small sons. Here we were at the famous Polo Grounds turnstile, and my father was arguing with the ticket taker that all five of us should be able to enter with one ticket among us. After several minutes of intense argument, and the line backed up with impatient ticket holders, the ticket taker reluctantly gave in and pushed us through, mumbling, "OK. Go ahead."

A similar thing happened when our local physician, Dr. Canright, examined all five of us, and my father holding a handful of dollar bills asked him, "How much do I owe you, Doctor?" Out loud, Dr. Canright said, "Let's see, \$5 times 5 kids...." Pop quickly interrupted him with the same, "Come on doctor. They're just little kids, and you didn't take that long." Dr. Canright, with the same exasperated look as the ticket taker, said, "OK Mr. Hobbie. Just give me \$10 and that will be fine." After I grew up, I understood why he had to stretch his money because he was the sole income earner supporting a family of nine.

The third time my father embarrassed me – and it was more than once – was when it was my turn to go with him on The Route. He was selling underwear to a family whose daughter was also my classmate – maybe 12 – 14 years old. He would call me over from where I was trying to become invisible, and say, "Son, watch me so you can learn," as her mother held up panties next to my classmate to make sure she got the right fit. The girl would always be equally mortified and tried to squirm away from her mother's insensitive grip. Little wonder that none of Pop's sons wanted to follow in the footsteps of their salesman father.

My father had what I would call a wry sense of humor. He found levity in many commonplace events. He didn't tell jokes. He told stories about people and situations that had lessons in them, sometimes funny ones. I honestly think I have inherited his sense of humor and have developed it somewhat further. My brain always tries to find levity in everyday life experiences. I also think I owe my sense of humor to my maternal grandmother, Sitto Tommy, who I learned much later in life from other relatives that she was hilarious.

The hardest thing about losing my father was that he was my "rock" in this complicated world, morally, ethically, and wise beyond description. He was the prism through which I viewed life. From the time of my early childhood, he and my grandfather Hobbie shaped my world, and it's their approval I always sought. They were the good guys, whose work ethic, fair play, caring, kindness,

decency, perseverance, and warmth guided my every decision-making and behavior. When my father died on September 29, 1969, he was still working his Route on a reduced schedule. I don't recall the exact number, but he had 40 or 50 of the original 300 customers who resided in the Union County area. Essie suggested we write a letter to the customers notifying them about Pop's passing and asking them to mail her a check for the outstanding balance, which ranged from \$25 to over \$100. My brothers and I disagreed because my father had built the business by allowing these people to purchase what they needed while paying him at least a minimum of \$2 a week. So, the brothers volunteered to take The Route every Saturday until the customers were able to comfortably pay off their account. We alternated Saturdays for a few months and were able to collect whatever they could afford. We entered all the payments on Pop's ledgers and turned the collected money to Essie. The wonderful thing about the visits is those dear customers told us stories about Pop and how much they cared for him. As we learned new stories, we would tell them to our brothers, Essie and Sitto, and it helped us to handle our loss by learning new things about him that we didn't know. Although I can't remember any of those stories, at the time they were very welcomed and shared. Even though I was away from my wife and children for several days, our collective efforts to close out those outstanding accounts proved to be rewarding for all of us.

When my Grandfather Hobbie had passed in 1959, as much as it hurt, Pop was still there. Once he unexpectedly passed at 70, my foundation was shaken to the core, and I felt that life would never be OK again. But it was OK again, even though it took some time because I was busily engaged in a demanding career and raising three beautiful children that brought my focus always to the present. I was constantly distracted from the pain of my great loss by helping or being there for my children, who were trying to figure out where they fit in this changing, challenging world. I soon understood in life we all will eventually lose those we love, and that dying is part of the

life cycle, and I must acclimate to it. Thank goodness for memories because as long as we live, the people we love will also live.

My fervent wish is that my father knew that his sons loved him and eventually felt that he was the best father in the world. As we grew older, we were able to understand the everyday pressures on him, as he fulfilled his responsibilities as a husband, son, father, breadwinner, plumber, electrician, gardener, teacher, barber, chauffeur, advisor, counselor, doctor, and all-around handyman.

My Mother, Esther Marian Sopp Hobbie

Mom, or Essie as she was affectionately called by most of the family, brought her dignity with her when she joined the Hobbie threesome in 1926. At the age of 18, she married my 27-year-old father in Cranford at that time and immediately had her hands full. She was the least understood of all my elders. She was put in a situation she did not expect. She had a stern mother-in-law riding herd on her. It took her great effort and many years to acclimate to that environment until she eventually emerged as the mistress of the house with many grandchildren relying on her late-achieved wisdom and strength, and the respect of her extended family. As a little boy, I witnessed her crying often when she was very young. Perhaps that was because before her marriage she had been placed in charge of her younger three sisters and brother in Homer, NY, and undoubtedly felt she had the competency to raise children and run a household. But when she arrived at 90 Winans Avenue, instead of being the mistress of the house, she became a reluctant sous chef under Sitto's strong tutelage. Giddo, on the other hand, provided her with care and understanding for her predicament. I recall him calming her down with soothing words of support after a run-in with my grandmother. And she always spoke to him with great kindness and respect.

As part of Mom's basic makeup, she was caring, sensitive, and learned to keep up with the hard-working Hobbie adult trio, and a family where everyone had to pitch in to support the breadwinner. I

think I was the most like her of all the boys and always tried to help her when she was hurting.

Another memory of Essie was riding on the train to Homer when I was 4 or 5. She sat on a train bench seat near an exit with a young woman and both of them were being very attentive to this train-sick youngster, and I liked being fussed over. I recall running up and down the aisle, but always returning to my mother, where I would be safe.

The sights, sound, and smells of my parents vary. Mom tried to be a lady, elegant, feminine in the role she was given, and that was very difficult given her role as the maid in residence. She worked hard and eventually was successful in her numerous roles as a mother, wife, daughter-in-law, and good neighbor. Raising five sons was not easy, especially when your in-laws lived with you and your mother-in-law had everything to say in the family life. It was a good time and a bad time. Although Mom cried often, it was usually hidden from others. She was a wonderful cook, and the smell of her kitchen was enchanting. Her support of all her children was unending, although painful at times.

Christmas and Thanksgiving were the most memorable celebrations we had as kids. Essie was the one who spearheaded the fuss and preparation for those events, and she was always pleased with herself, as evidenced by her letters to me at college and while in the Army in Japan. The great food was central to it, and seeing the extended family together made it successful for her. As an adult, participating in these celebrations was wonderful. The larger the gathering, the better it was. As kids, when far-away relatives came, we willingly gave up our beds to sleep on the back porch or on mattresses on the living room floor. It was exciting! What added to these visits, usually from Upstate New York, was that I really didn't understand who they all were, except that they made all of us, especially Essie, very happy. There seemed to be a lot of love and laughter associated with all those visits, and we were all on our best behavior. A side note: Those visitors took on an aura of importance to the household beyond what they were. Somehow our parents' welcoming demeanor conveyed a

stature for each of the visitors that projected them as more than mere acquaintances – they were treated like nobility. Of course, I can only see that now. I was too caught up from 5 – 12 years old to understand what I was experiencing.

Essie's pots and pans, and her kitchen utensils, augmented by the few I've added to the mix in the past four decades, are still part of her kitchen today. It feels good using Essie's – and Sitto's – measuring cups, skillets, and the like. There are even some new items that I rarely use because I enjoy the old family ones more. I use her oregano and cinnamon in different dishes, like eggs and peppers; eggs, potatoes, and onions; grilled cheese, pasta primavera with mushrooms, broccoli, and canned baby artichokes.

It's difficult to explain how brushing past her several aprons hanging in the pantry fills me with a joyful feeling that doesn't translate into words. It's wonderful feeling her presence.

My grandfather, Norman Hobbie (Giddo)

Among my fondest memories of my paternal grandfather is when he and my grandmother were involved baking bread for the family. This monthly ritual occurred like clockwork and formed the basis of happiness through our many senses. There was nothing like the smell, taste, touch, and grateful stomach of those wonderful days. It was almost a miracle how the two of them would disappear into our cavernous cellar at 5:00 in the morning. They would prepare the wood-fed stove and begin baking the already prepared dough into the tastiest pita bread and other specialties of every size and dimension. I will never forget the taste of the never-to-be-duplicated spinach pies, meat pies, and zataar bread (Lebanese pizza).

In my mind's ear, I can hear him singing his favorite song, "Lindy, Lindy, ya tiar." We thought this was just an old Arabic song, but it turns out it was about the flight of the international pilot, Colonel Charles Lindbergh, as he soared non-stop across the Atlantic and landed in Paris to the acclamation of throngs of its citizenry. We didn't realize this until decades later, when my brother Ed at college

wrote these endearing words: He said that the many Arabic songs we heard while growing up had to do with various historical events that I had never known had been memorialized in that way.

My grandfather helped my high school teenage circle of friends for many years in a most unusual way. I recall my friends and I congregating in our cellar, where my grandfather hung his many hats and coats he used when working around the yard. Prior to attending basketball games, my buddies and I would stop in that cellar location and “borrow” one item each to wear. I personally went for hats and began to establish what I thought was a new fad. I still see us struttin’ into the gymnasium with my entourage all decked out with one piece of apparel from my grandfather’s unique wardrobe. I was sure the crowd would envy, admire, and be surprised by us looking so cool. And the crowd of kids always rewarded us with murmurs or giggles. That lasted for a few years, until I began to mature.

Giddo Hobbie was kind, caring, patient, strong, hard-working, and wise. I have so many memories of him but three stand out. When I was five or six, I was sitting on his lap in the living room, where everyone was gathered after dinner. I was squeezing his arm muscles, and saying, “How strong you are!” He laughed and said, “No. They are *lanay* (soft) now.” I was impressed with the size of his arms, but he remembered when he was young and I had been told he was exceptionally strong. Many, many years later, I recall Giddo sitting at the “utta-da-a” (the back room) window for hours and hours. I wondered whether he was thinking of the days when he would expertly load Pop’s dry goods into his car every day, efficiently placing them for easy retrieval by Pop as he went on his Route. And/or surveying the property where our extensive garden was situated. Or was he seeing all the new houses that had been built over the years on those fields where the goats had been tethered or the poison ivy had flourished? Or was he looking at the area where Rankin’s Coal Yard had been located because that’s where he had stabled the horse he and Sitto used to pull their cart when they ran The Route...or perhaps all of the above.

My saddest memory was when he suffered a stroke and was in bed trying to talk to my brother Ernie and me. He made unintelligible sounds as we told him how much we loved him and never would forget him. Eventually, Dr. Kassouf asked us to leave Sitto's room, and minutes later the doctor emerged notifying us that he had passed. I learned a life lesson a few days later when I was at Dooley's Funeral Home and leaned over the casket to kiss my beloved Giddo goodbye. I never did that again when I lost my parents and Sitto because when I kissed Giddo, instead of the warm cheek of my wonderful grandfather, I felt that I was kissing an ice-cold piece of marble. His soul was gone, and that left a cold, empty body. It's the main reason I decided to be cremated.

My Grandmother, Elizabeth Boutrous Hobbie (Sitto)

I found it surprising that a rummage through my source material found so little new data about Sitto, the adult who had an inordinate amount of influence on the family. What I have figured out over the decades since her passing is that probably much of the control she exhibited over most aspects of our youth was necessary. She had already proven herself by her solo trek from Lebanon to America. She had established herself as a businesswoman and arranged for her husband and child, my father, to join her. She had done the difficult work and felt she had to mold my young 18-year-old beleaguered mother into an adult-appropriate wife, parent, and daughter-in-law who, very soon after her marriage, had to fulfill several new demanding roles. I now believe it was through necessity not a desire to control our lives. It was difficult to have that perspective while I was growing up. However, after we had all created our own futures, she completely changed and created a much different type of relationship, which was much less intrusive but always supporting.

Sitto was strong-willed, hard-working, determined, thrifty, relentless, and the religious center of our family. She was dedicated to the raising of her grandchildren as god-fearing, clean-cut, hard-working young men. She constantly warned us about marrying the

right kind of woman. (I think she had experienced serious strife in her youth between females and males. I don't think any of us grandchildren ever found out what it was.) She would say, "If you marry a woman with a loose fist, you will never make enough money to support your family. But if you marry a woman with a tight fist, no matter how little money you make, you'll always have enough to raise your family."

She was very clever and an excellent businesswoman and saleslady. She was the most financially trustworthy member of the family, and whenever we earned money from any type of job like snow-shoveling, caddying, newspaper route, etc., we entrusted the money to Sitto until we would either spend it or get to put it in the bank. I always thought that Sitto had a private line to God and together they would keep the world livable, tolerable, and acceptable. After Pop passed away is when she became very mellow in the remaining few years of her life. She was a different person. The toughness had gone as she ceded all the control and power to Essie who, to her credit, continued to keep Sitto in the loop, treating her with the utmost respect, which enabled Sitto to maintain her dignity.

My grandfather, Philip Sopp (Giddo Tommy)

Giddo Tommy Sopp was a short, serious, memorable dynamo. He was stern but warm, strong-willed but affable. He would hold court each day with his visiting cronies. He plied his trade...and devoured food...with similar enthusiasm. One could tell he enjoyed both. I don't remember seeing him with a musical instrument, but I was told he played the oud, was extremely talented and much sought-after to perform. As in the case of my Giddo Hobbie, I felt very close to Giddo Tommy, and trusted him to protect and guide me whenever I was in his presence. I became very comfortable with the sounds and smells that emanated within his shoe shop, where I spent much time every day. I was very much at home in that territory despite the fact that he was sternly very much in charge.

My Aunt Margaret told me that the disease that had struck him down left him somewhat paralyzed and gave him a horrible death. From the look on her face, she must have been there to witness it. I prefer to remember him either happily replacing heels and soles in his shoe store, or enjoying himself at the annual Cortland County Fair, playing bingo and occasionally winning a coveted prize. I still think about my boyhood summers in Upstate New York.

It occurs to me that other than a few places in my family books, I never told people about the most exciting aspects of those months in that area. I would read the many, many signs all summer of the big week or so of the Cortland County State Fair. It was located on the border between Homer and Cortland and covered several acres. In fact, many decades later, when I visited my relatives, we would dine at a restaurant located across the road from that area. I would always linger for a few moments looking at the now-empty field, trying to visualize the captivating scenes of yesterday when it was mobbed by thousands of happy, noisy attendees. I don't believe the Fair has been held for decades, but I don't know for sure because there are so few people to ask. Although I am hard-pressed to remember all of the numerous attractions of that sprawling, noisy event, I do remember my grandparents' main attraction. That was the huge bingo tents, packed with anxious players, who were all playing several cards at once to become the winners of various tempting prizes.

Essentially most of the time period in Homer was at my grandfather's shoe store because my grandmother was either on her work shift at the factory in Cortland or doing errands. I loved watching him repair shoes, every step of the way from carving out the shape of the sole to smoothing down the edges with the electric sander wheels. Then he would slather on a black or brown dye to blend the sole with the color of that particular shoe. I probably would have gotten a buzz on had I inhaled it long enough. I can still see him bent over his work, nails sticking out of his mouth as he'd pick out one, insert it in the proper place, and then hammer it in, then reach for another nail. He was always so focused on his tasks. I even

liked the smell of the dye/polish he applied to the repaired shoe. Then they would be put on a shelf for finished products, awaiting a pickup from the appropriate customer. He had such pride in his work, and I shared his enjoyment.

Why did I become an avid reader? It's started in Giddo Tommy's shoe shop. I spent a lot of time sitting on the bench behind the shoe-shining pedestal. Once in a while, one of Giddo Tommy's friends, like Joe Yaman, would drop in to chat with him while he repaired shoes. Periodically they would ask his grandson if he was old enough to shine their shoes for a nickel. That was a lot of money, and I always accepted the challenge, I can hear Giddo's voice saying, "Be sure to do a good job, Nami." And I always did, applying the wax, brushing the shoes, and then finishing it off with a rag to make sure they shined. But in between those few jobs, I sat for hours, allowing Sitto Tommy to run errands, cook, or visit friends and relatives. By trying to read books beyond me I was soon able to comprehend how to read for content, and it helped me in my later education and I became an English major.

My grandmother, Anna Joseph Sopp (Sitto Tommy)

Once again, my source material for my other grandmother is meager although in my memory she appeared more involved in my New York State life than the available data revealed. It was similar to my New Jersey grandmother, a matter of misunderstanding her role in my life because of my youthfulness and personal goals. Similar to Sitto Hobbie, Sitto Tommy seemed to thwart my efforts to explore and develop but instead wanted to demonstrate adult control on this youngster. Sitto Tommy was a tale of three women. The first was the one who cared for me during my annual visits and was terrified that something would happen to me and have to answer to her eldest daughter, Essie (who already had lost her 9-year-old son, Marhoum Eddie). Sitto Tommy was energetic and operated at a high speed in most facets of her life. She was a diabetic and had to have daily insulin shots that never slowed her down. She could cook the fastest

meal ever and made the best lemon meringue pie I ever ate (or was it my age?). While she was always on the move, she wanted me to sit quietly in the screened porch and play solitaire. I, on the other hand, wanted to go down those steep stairs and play with the kids behind the school across the street. I also wanted to roam, to explore, to walk along Main Street and check out the window displays of the neighboring stores. Her trump card was, “Why don’t you listen like your brother Ernie?” You would see the anguish on her face when I balked at my imprisonment and always pushed the boundaries for some freedom from my lonely boredom.

The second Sitto Tommy was the one who took me to her weekend job at The Lehigh Hotel restaurant in Cortland, working as a cook for her niece, my Aunt Saleamie and Uncle Fred Isaf, where I was very happy. To this 12-year-old, there was nothing better than a plate of spaghetti, buttered bread, and a cold draft beer from the tap. I was king of the world on those occasions.

The third Sitto Tommy I didn’t discover until I wrote my first family book, but that’s when I met the Josephs. Remember all those cousins I discovered who I didn’t know about? She was one of 14 – 16 siblings! Anyway, everyone I spoke to portrayed her as a fun-loving, laughing, wild-spirited woman who was known as Aunt Ze-line by them. If you want to learn more about the high-spirited side of Sitto Tommy, read that second book.

An introduction to my series of personal remembrances

I was about to end this chapter when an event occurred that was like being hit by a sledgehammer. My dearest friend, Dr. Francis J. Mertz, lost a courageous battle and passed away. He had been my friend and mentor for about 50 years. He was one of the finest gentlemen I ever met. It’s impossible to evaluate the positive influence he had on my life.

For that reason, I decided that I had to share information about him on this journey through life. Then, as Frank always did, he got me to mull over the “big picture”...to examine my mind...to be

introspective. My wise and thoughtful friend got me to think about some other important people I met on the long journey I was traveling. When the dust settled, the list of one had grown to almost 80. Starting with Chapter 3, I will begin to include brief vignettes of those other important figures in my life – each section introduced with the phrase, “Other folks I’ll never forget.”

I was reminded of those very fine people who impacted my life in a very positive, rewarding manner. Many are relatives, either closely or remotely related. The list only includes the people I love or cared about...the ones I respected. I divided my list into mentors, friends, colleagues, or relatives. A few people actually fell into more than one category. As a human being, I fear I will have accidentally omitted a few of the dear people, and to those I apologize.

What I have chosen to write varies. Sometimes I provide some background, other times anecdotes about an event or escapade with them. Occasionally, I combined a little bit of both. More than half of them are departed. A large number are in their 80s. Others live far away, and it’s unlikely I will ever see them again except in my heart and mind. All of them have been part of my long journey and have greatly enriched my life and will always be part of me. They exist in my mind’s videotape, reminding me of how they affected me in a positive, rewarding manner.

Sometimes, I repeated information I had previously published, but only to help the context or because I wanted to expand on the topic, adding more information. I wrote those vignettes about the people in my life and divided them among some of the chapters that follow so that the reader wouldn’t have too many people to read about consecutively. There’s no specific reason for the order, mostly how my brain remembers the people and events. The first one, of course, begins with Frank Mertz. And because he was the reason I included this vast number of associates, his will be a much longer write up than most of the others.

Other folks I'll never forget
Francis J. Mertz

As I stare at my writing pad, I realize that I have delayed writing this vignette for several weeks for fear I will not do justice to Frank Mertz, one of the finest human beings I was lucky enough to call a friend. I am still devastated by his passing. For the past 50 years, he had been a beacon of goodness in my life. His caring, kind, sensitive feelings about the human race gave me hope that the increasingly chaotic, evil actions throughout the world would not overcome humanity because of people like Frank.

I had penned some of my feelings to Gail, his lovely wife, and often his alter ego because there was never a couple that was a more perfect team. One of the things that I learned during my long friendship with Frank is that Gail is also an exceptional human being. She is wise, kind, gentle, and a leader. She is the CEO of their accomplished and loving family. And I am privileged to count her as a dear friend to me as well. Frank and Gail traveled extensively throughout the world, including to remote places few people think of visiting. They absorbed so much about where they went that I thoroughly enjoyed Frank's very detailed descriptions of their experiences. It made me feel as though I had made the trip with them.

Frank and I lunched often with others, occasionally just together, and also dined with Gail at various restaurants. All occasions were enjoyable and memorable. However, that which lingers foremost in my memory is sitting at a corner table in The Spanish Tavern on Route 22 in Mountainside, New Jersey, dividing a large dish of shrimp scampi and savoring those delicious sea creatures while enjoying the special moments. I will always remember those other frequent lunches with Frank, Bill Donohue, and Bob Bozzomo. The

host would pick the restaurant and we would each arrive from different parts of New Jersey. I don't recall a time when Frank was not already seated, waiting for the rest of us to arrive. Those periodic several-hour luncheons were always enjoyed by all of us because we talked, ate, relaxed, laughed often, and left in happy moods, eager for the next one.

A few years ago, I was very uncomfortable with an issue I was coping with – what appeared to be an overwhelming problem at one of the schools I was teaching at. Frank invited me to lunch at a local restaurant, armed with his ever-present warmth, and using his vast wisdom and knowledge, broke down the issue into small, understandable pieces that were easy to handle. He miraculously lifted the weight of the world from my shoulders. I left that luncheon feeling the stars and moon were once again aligned properly.

I cannot ever remember meeting Frank any place without observing his ever-present contagious smile. Frank was a joy to be with, always presenting a positive picture of whatever the topic we were discussing. Whether it was a world issue, local news, or some sports event, the discussion would always be thorough and enjoyable.

Frank and Gail's benevolence had no borders. It might be about a student they were sponsoring who needed their financial backing or counsel, they were involved. Their large, caring family reflected their values, and they physically visited each of them wherever they resided across the United States. It was always interesting when they related one of their visits about their ever-expanding family. I have so many stories about those relationships that I would need to write a separate book to enumerate them all.

I will repeat a few more comments I wrote in my letter to Gail because they were probably read by only a limited audience. I have a very vivid memory of attending the ceremonies at which Frank publicly was sworn in as president

of Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he spent a decade at the helm of that highly respected institution. It was at that event that I became aware of what an excellent orator he was. His strong, resounding voice will always be a permanent part of remembering that moving acceptance speech.

I've learned much from Frank over the past 50 years, and consider myself lucky to have been within his orbit as he reached for the stars. His physical presence is no longer here, but his wisdom will remain with me always. In our lifetime, occasionally we get to know an extraordinary, unforgettable giant.

Frank Mertz was one of them.



My dear friends, the unforgettable
Frank and Gail Mertz.



My indomitable and loving Sitto Hobbie
in the mid-1950s.



Pop with, from left: Eddie, Ernie, Bobby, and me.



Essie as a Homer, NY, teenager, and our grand lady in 1982.



Sitto Tommy Sopp in her finery, 1940s. Her nieces fondly referred to her as Aunt Zeini.



My high school therapist, Issa, who got me through my senior year in 1949.



My beloved Giddo Hobbie with his first great-grandson, Joey, in the mid-1950s.

Chapter 3:

Education, Reading, Writing, and More

My first major reading was at Giddo Tommy's shoe store in Homer, NY. It was 85 or more years ago, so I'm not going to guess the name of the thick book that I sat next to. It was either "Moby Dick" or "A Tale of Two Cities." I read them both at a very early age. It was very difficult to understand the plots at my young age of 7 – 9. I worked very hard at it and felt good about the praise I got from the adults who often commented about it. Eventually, the readings made sense, and I began enjoying stories about the early settlers, all of Jack London's books, and everything I could get my hands on. Essie always encouraged me, and got me enrolled in the Cranford Public Library, where I found a home.... It didn't cost a penny.

What followed in grammar, junior and high school could be attributed to my mother for pushing me into reading as a boy. And my English teacher, Alice Mathews, for encouraging that effort in high school. Miss Mathews helped by praising and supporting my reading and writing, and I wanted to repay both their efforts by excelling in both literary areas.

I found that by reading magazines, newspapers, books, newsletters, and the such, I broadened my ability. I had such a weird imagination, and the books enabled me to visit exciting places, eras; once I got on a roll, there was no stopping me. It became a part of my life, and later on, in higher education, I loved anything to do with literature...American, English, European, Mid-East, and Asian. You name it. To this day, in my 94th year, I love reading and writing and spend much of each day doing so.

I enjoy many magazines because they enable me to stay informed on what's happening in all parts of the world. I realize that each publication slants its coverage one way or the other, so I have to work hard to be wary of the bias each contains. I have to remember that

it is usually just the publishers', editors', writers' personal opinion of what is transpiring in this complicated and ever-changing world. The same goes for TV news, and I watch different channels to ensure that I'm not just having tunnel vision. I want to see how each network interprets events. At times, this is difficult because some networks don't cover or air some major events. It disappoints me because all reputable networks should just cover the world and allow the viewers to make up their minds according to their individual value systems. I don't believe the networks should ignore, slant, or spin the event based on their own bias. Unfortunately, that's not the way it happens.

As I grew older, books became my favorites. I found the secret was to alternate between fiction and non-fiction. To this day, I thoroughly enjoy reading about World War II – fiction or non-fiction. I learn so much and read anecdotes that are often priceless. For example, when FDR wrote his famous speech to Congress on December 8, 1941, it's reported he crossed out the words, "would live in history" and wrote "in infamy." Mark Twain once said, "The difference between the almost-right word and the right word is really a large matter – tis the difference between the lightning bug and lightning." And Oliver Wendell Holmes said that Roosevelt was a man of immense, charm and persuasion. Winston Churchill said, "Meeting Franklin Roosevelt was like opening your first bottle of champagne." And even this morning, I read about a GI taking part in the World War II Sicily or Algiers invasion. He was complaining that the soles of his shoes were so thin that when he stepped on a wad of gum, he could tell the flavor."

In college, I had a course called, "European Literature," and I especially enjoyed the French, Italian, and Russian writers. The Russians fired up my imagination and creativity. I loved the struggle between the classes. I loved the themes of how the poor serfs struggled to achieve. I loved the power and intrigue among the nobility. Strangely, I was able to empathize with everyone's point of view because everything seemed like real-life experiences, not Hollywood-style dancing on tables while listening to the music from juke boxes.

The great movie, “Dr. Zhivago,” with Omar Shariff, Julie Christie, and Geraldine Chaplin enabled me to visualize it exactly the way I thought it was when I read the book, with all that snow, the steppes, the mountains. It was all reinforced by “War and Peace,” one of the longest and best books I’ve ever read. I highly recommend it to you, but be prepared that it will take some time. By the way, in my old age, the way I handle very long books because of my shorter attention span is to place a bookmark at the beginning of the next chapter many pages ahead of where I am, giving me a goal that is more easily achievable than facing the entire, long book. Incidentally, if I’m able to finish the many books I currently have lined up, I intend to reread “War and Peace” 70-some years later. I’m almost certain it will be like reading it for the first time. Not only will I have forgotten a lot, but the perspectives I will have because of life lessons will provide an entirely different experience than reading it as a 20-year-old man.

Shakespeare was something I devoted time to in college. It took intense scrutiny to understand him and like his style of writing. Later in life, when I tried to read Shakespeare along with some modern-day novels, I had difficulty understanding him. It once again required intense scrutiny to make sense of his beautiful works.

I kept my eyes reasonably healthy by going to the appropriate doctors regularly. I think I was in my late ‘20s when I began to need reading glasses. I recall my mother telling me, “If you’re reading something, it’s good to look away from the print once in a while and focus on something far away for a minute to allow your eyes to rest.” I did that for most of my life, and also tried to refrain from rubbing my eyes hard when they were bothering me. I would use a tissue, and gently wipe them instead of grinding away as some people do.

To give you an idea of how much time I spend reading, this past week I finished “Berlin Noir,” by my favorite author Philip Kerr (I have all his books, and am so sorry he passed away a few years ago.) I also squeezed in, “The Secret,” by Rhonda Byrne, a book Julio, my friend and auto mechanic, gave me to read. And one of my several Georges Simenon books, “Maigret is Afraid.” Currently, I’m reading

“America’s Secret Army: The Untold Story of the Army Counterintelligence Corps.” Even though I spent 3 years in the CIC, I’m learning so much about it that I didn’t know. As you know, reading ranks at the top of my to-do list. Number one used to be eating, before I lost my taste buds.

Why Philip Kerr? Because he wrote 13 books about pre-World War II, World War II, and post-war Europe. It’s the best setting for those intriguing espionage stories that captivate me. What he did effectively was to create a detective/investigator who wasn’t perfect but was likeable. He wove actual historical events into the plots, using the notorious leaders of that era. Our hero, Bernie Gunther, was forced to carry out special investigations for those leaders, but usually was able to veer away from the assignment to accomplish good things. Kerr also introduced various appealing female characters, who were attracted to Bernie, which added some mystery, romance, and a touch of spice to the plots. The 13 books are exceptionally good, with only the last one, “Metropolis,” being a little weak in substance. I have already undertaken a third reading of these wonderful books. It’s the one positive thing about my aging memory because the second time I read them 2 years ago; they were like new books.

I fell in love with most genres associated with literature. And even when I had a family, I continued reading, creating libraries in my homes wherever I lived. I had the most beautiful bookshelves built in the den of my home on Herbert Road in Scotch Plains, NJ. That probably was my favorite room of all the houses we lived in. I loved to read in front of the fireplace. I used to enjoy splitting the wood stumps and stacking them in the garage for easy access on very cold days. One of my happiest ventures was writing the two self-published books in 2003 and 2005 about the Hobbie family, relatives and friends. I worked very hard on the research and writing with great encouragement, support, and editorial advice from family members and others. On the occasion of the publication of each book, my friend Jim Yaman spearheaded and coordinated events in

his hometown of Cortland, NY, which ended up being two reunions for my family and friends.

When my daughter Meg asked me for advice on writing, here's what I told her: First of all, carve out space where you will always write, as in my case the dining room table. Keep your supplies there, and soon you will gravitate to that spot for comfortable, enjoyable writing. If you have a book in mind, try to make a thorough outline, and then periodically review it, adding new subtopics that belong in each general category. You should organize the material so that the information logically follows each story, and think about what questions need to be researched and answered. Always make sure you write your ideas down right away so you don't forget them. One of my most valuable tools was always carrying a small notebook to write down one of the many brainstorms. No matter where I was or the time of day or night, a written word usually translated into several pages of written material the following day. You can select timeframes to do your research, especially if you've run into a writer's block. The new information, which may take effort to access, should allow you to create new areas of interest. And when the words are flowing, try not to stop because you don't know when you'll have the momentum again. Another thing I found helpful was that periodically I reviewed what I had written, and asked myself who, what, where, why, how, and when – that will always provide me with “grist for the mill.” Once you've written a draft, let it sit for a few days, or if you're lucky enough to have a trusted friend to review the material, ask for ideas from those fresh eyes.

When I wrote my two books, I did them ass backwards. Rather than starting with a theme and an outline, I developed from the material available to me. I researched all my old letters, notes, articles, and went through them for leads. I placed similar materials in like groups. Then I would write everything I knew about each stand-alone group. Afterwards, I sat on the living room floor, and organized the groups into a logical pattern that told a story. I had written everything I knew about each individual group, and then wrote a preface

based on the story, and then tied all the groups together with transitional paragraphs so that the material flowed smoothly for the reader. In my case, my friend Jane Biba would edit the draft, write comments or questions, which I would address, and then she'd review and copy edit the final copy. When it was completed, as a sanity check, I asked my brother Eddie to read the manuscript. He made some wonderful additions I had not known about, raised a few questions, which I answered, and then I finalized the manuscript. Also, I have to apologize to my youngest brother Bobby, who had made several excellent suggestions for my previous books, but I misremembered the source and attributed them elsewhere. Sorry, and thank you Bob!

I decided to self-publish for two reasons: I wanted it to be "out there" because it was a tribute to my parents and grandparents, and secondly I didn't want anyone to have to pay a penny to read it. Self-publishing meant I could control the process and get it published quickly. If I were to do it again, I would look for a local New York City company, not in the Midwest where I had to deal with mail delays. I made publishing the book my top priority because I wanted it in the hands of older people ASAP.

I must tell you, I am still thrilled to know how many people I made happy when they read their family's story in a book that will always be there.

While I'm on the subject of education, etc., I want to talk briefly about my role as an educator. After retiring from a 33-year career at AT&T, I spent the next 33 years in the field of higher education. Teaching was one of the most rewarding jobs I had ever undertaken, and it filled me with happiness. There is such a joy in "reaching" a student, teaching them something that would help them for the rest of their life. I learned two important principles. I have found that the best way to understand something was to have the person explain the process or function to someone else. I learned that early in my work life. If I could explain something in detail to someone, it was so cemented in my brain that I would retain it forever. It was so helpful to my development over the years. To know your information

extremely well gives you tremendous power. It allows you to come to a topic from any angle, pick up the thread, and be able to weave it into a clear, easily understood explanation.

The second principle was which course was the most valuable to college kids that would provide skills necessary for the rest of their lives. I taught many sections of a course called, “Dynamics of Communication,” which was all about communication during interpersonal relationships. I learned more about me and my function in the real world than any other class I ever took or taught. On a daily basis for over 25 years, including in many New Jersey prisons where I also taught that course, I saw students overwhelmingly react positively to its place in their lives. I wish it could be a mandatory class for all high school seniors, stipulating that you must take and pass that course in order to graduate. I don’t believe any other single course qualifies you to live in our increasingly complex society than that one.

Other folks I’ll never forget
Alice Mathews

Alice Mathews was my Cranford High School English teacher. She was short in height but tall in wisdom and talent. Miss Mathews helped me tremendously in two aspects of maturing. I received many positive comments about my written work from her, saying that I had a lot of talent and encouraging me to pursue the field of writing. She was so expressive when reading from a play. She kept me spellbound. While reading the material from a play, she often acted out several of the characters with great emotion. Her ability to convey their feelings was unbelievable.

I tended to joke around a lot. One day she approached me after class and told me I was too smart to be fooling around so much, and she began to cry. She appeared so sincere that I was taken aback, and never again made jokes in any of her classes.

Several years later, I returned to the area where she had lived in a small cottage to thank her for that wonderful support she gave me. I vaguely can picture the scene, but I remember feeling very sad to learn that she had moved away to another community.

Harold Wilson

Harold Wilson taught me chemistry in Cranford High School, and was one of the most serious of all my educators. He was extremely intelligent, and I always felt I was at the fountain of knowledge whenever he spoke. One of the most profound expressions he ever told me...and to this day I have quoted him often to family and friends...went something like this: "Young man, you will find out that the more you learn, the more you will realize how little you know." It was true when he told me at 17 years of age...and remains to be so.

He also taught me a good lesson about not speaking out of turn in class. When I foolishly did so, disrupting one of his lectures, he told me to see him after school that day. I was scheduled to be the starting pitcher in a Cranford High School baseball game at another location, and had to leave by bus mid-afternoon, so I protested. He stared at me and repeated, "See me after school today." I immediately sought out my baseball coach, who taught English, and explained my predicament to him, expecting him to intercede on my behalf. He curtly said to me, "I hope you learned your lesson," and walked away. I reported to Harold Wilson after school while the team traveled by bus to play against another school. Incidentally, I never got to start another baseball game in high school. I was not happy about it, but I definitely learned my lesson. You, and you alone, are responsible for the consequences from your actions.

On an interesting side note that fits the title of the book, “I’ve lived long enough to learn,” I was talking on the telephone to Danny Caruso, my classmate, teammate, and still personal friend who is a few months younger than my 94, and I related the story to him. He told me something I did not know or remember, and that was that he was then picked to pitch that baseball game. He was very happy about it, but he didn’t know the backstory.

Ollie West

While in Cranford High School, another one of my favorite teachers was Ollie West, who taught math and algebra. He made teaching appear to be enjoyable, and that probably was one of the reasons I excelled in his classes. He had great humor, and would toss the chalk from hand to hand as he happily explained the intricacies of algebraic equations. Years later, when I taught at various colleges, I made it a point to include humor in my communications classes. His classes were the highlight of my schedule. It was no wonder that when I went on to college, those subjects he taught me were easy for me because he had prepared me so well. Years later, when I was in Japan, my younger brother Ed wrote that Ollie West asked about me. He was that kind of a human being.

Dr. Knox Wilson

At Davis & Elkins College, Dr. Knox Wilson was an exceptional professor who taught English. Eventually I had him in several literature classes. He was slight of build, wore glasses, and had a wry sense of humor. His very easy-going, informative style of lecturing was easy to follow, and he was ever the subject-matter expert on all aspects of his

material. In those several literature classes I had him, I felt substantial growth in my attitude and knowledge of those challenging courses.

Most of the professors and instructors during the course of my life at various schools have either faded into oblivion or are impossible to clearly visualize. However, I can see Dr. Wilson some 72 years later, emoting his words of wisdom to a captivated class. At that time, there wasn't a moment that I had thought I would one day find it most rewarding standing in front of a class teaching communications.

Before I ever met him, Dr. Wilson had had an unusual encounter with me as part of my grant-in-aid scholarship. I was responsible for caring for the 3rd Floor of the school building in which he taught. Essentially, that meant sweeping out, lining up the chairs, and washing the blackboards in about six classrooms. No matter how little or how long a time it took me, I was told to put 3 hours each day on my work card.

You can appreciate that I wanted to perform these duties as quickly as possible so that I could have more free time. I honestly don't recall how long it took me, but I functioned like a whirling dervish. Nothing got in my way as I rapidly raced through each classroom, performing those specified duties. One day my supervisor approached me, and using a very serious tone of voice, said Dr. Knox Wilson, from one of the classrooms I was servicing, wanted to see the student who was responsible for his room. Terrified, I went to Dr. Wilson's classroom, wondering had I left the blackboards streaky, or was it a different complaint. He beckoned me into the room, where he was talking to two students, and stood up. That's when I realized how short he was. When I told him that I have the job of keeping his classroom clean, he smiled, reached out his right hand and said, "I want you to know this is the first semester anyone has cleaned my classroom as

well as you do. I want to personally thank you,” as he shook my hand. I was absolutely shocked, but made my way out of the room.

The next semester, I had Dr. Wilson for an English literature class. It had about 9 or 10 students, and I was the only male. On occasion, he would quip that he and I were outnumbered during group discussions by the females. It so happens that we were studying Shakespeare prior to the Christmas break, and I was having some difficulty understanding the Bard’s style of writing. The campus closed down, and most students went home for the holidays. That is except the basketball team because we had several away games scheduled for the holidays. It meant staying on a nearly empty campus for a few weeks. There was only one movie house in town, so after seeing the weekly feature, there was nothing to do.

One boring evening, I pulled out my Shakespeare textbook and began to reread what we had already done. I soon began to understand his style of writing, so I moved ahead to read the upcoming assignments and surprise, surprise, they made sense, and I understood them.

When we returned from Christmas recess, I dazzled the class with my new-found understanding. At one point, Dr. Wilson, without looking up from his seat, said, “Mr. Hobbie has apparently been doing some reading over the holidays.” To say I felt very good about Dr. Wilson’s comment is a vast understatement.

Press Maravich

The legendary basketball coach has left a strong impression on my mind. I met him in 1951 when I arrived in Elkins, West Virginia, as one of his new players. He had yet to become famous, and impress the basketball world with the name Maravich. He had grown up in Pennsylvania, and

literally fought his way onto basketball teams, first as a player, then as a coach. He always told it the way he saw it, and used many words that would have been censored from the TV networks. In fact, later in life, I watched him interviewed on TV, and was amazed that he was able to carry on the conversation without saying anything that had to be censored. He was tough, determined, willing to admit a mistake, and goal driven. Books could be written about his long, stormy and successful career.

Personally I had an incident in my first year in Elkins. I was walking my date home one evening on the back streets of that small town, and lo and behold Press and his wife stepped off the porch of a house where they had been socializing. Unfortunately for me, it was after the team's 10:00 p.m. curfew, and all that Press did was to make eye contact with me. I knew I was in trouble. At the end of the next team practice, he said, "Seeing that you're in such great shape, Hobbie, I'd like you to run 15 laps after practice for a week." Even though I was fighting a horrible cold, I knew that I was in the wrong and would have to take my punishment.

A big event involving Press Maravich was when he brought in the Harlem Globetrotters, a world-famous entertaining basketball team, to play in our newly built large gymnasium. In order to allow our basketball team to attend this packed event, he had us all dress up in shirts and ties, and usher the game. The Globetrotters brought their own opponent with them, as they do when they travel throughout the world. The only aspect of the evening I recall is a halftime exhibition by about 5-year-old Pete Maravich and "Goose" Tatum's son of the same age, dribbling a basketball with great skill and control while the crowd roared. Goose Tatum was the main attraction for the Harlem Globetrotters. Both children wore large kneepads and attractive, very small, colorful uniforms. Little did any of us imagine that decades later, Pete

would be called “Pistol Pete,” and rewrite all the collegiate and NBA scoring records as a prolific, multi-talented superstar. His father would also leave his coaching duties at Davis & Elkins College and eventually end up at LSU, where coaching his son, Pistol Pete, he would also become famous. There is very little doubt that the name Maravich will ever be forgotten by basketball fans.

John Bilney

I first met John at the Cranford Grammar School Marble Playoffs. I represented Lincoln School and he was Roosevelt School’s candidate. I was extremely nervous because at 11 years old I had not really ventured out of my neighborhood before this occasion. John defeated me, and I was crushed by my weak showing. John made sure we talked afterwards, and he made me feel much better about myself. Within a few months, we were attending 7th Grade at the Cranford High School across town. We were in many of the same classes, and found that we both had and liked several of them. Also we both played on the 7th Grade basketball team. We double-dated several times during our high school years, and played on the school basketball and baseball teams. John was a much better athlete in both sports. It was John who convinced me to go to Union Junior College to play basketball rather than join the Navy, as I had intended. He also was instrumental in former West Virginia basketball star Joe Duff obtaining a basketball scholarship for me at Davis & Elkins College.

John remained someone I liked and respected his entire life. He worked for IBM and several decades later died on a tennis court playing with one of his sons. In remembering John as a bright, happy young man, I realized that he was always a force for good with anyone he came in contact with.

Danny Caruso

I vaguely recall running into Danny in grammar school when a few of us from Lincoln School played tag football behind Sherman School, which he attended. The friendship grew stronger after 7th Grade when we moved on to Cranford High School. We played basketball and baseball together, and would walk home each day with a few friends. Like John Bilney, he was usually one of the participants in those many pick-up games here, there and everywhere. We were both children of immigrants, and shared similar feelings about growing up in suburban Cranford. Danny also attended the local junior college, and then graduated from Bowling Green University.

For most of his adult career, Danny worked as a journalist for several newspapers. During the ensuing years, we both were very engaged in providing for and raising our own families, and therefore did not see very much of one another. However, prior to the pandemic, we reconnected and Danny and his lovely wife Ann used to share periodic meals at several restaurants in the county. Those occasions were fun, times for reminiscing and not often enough. Decades later, we find ourselves gratefully enjoying our time in our nineties, exchanging letters and cartoons and occasional phone calls. Over a lifetime, Danny has proven to be an intelligent, warm, kind, and wonderful friend. His wife Ann represents the same values, and always adds so much to our get-togethers.

Nemo Koury

From my early childhood, I looked up to Norm Koury, who was known by his popular nickname, Nemo. He lived across the street on Winans Avenue and was three years and

two grades older than I. Initially I thought we were cousins, and he often referred to me as such. He definitely was a mentor because he was the gold standard I wanted to become. He was strong, a leader, and skilled in the three major sports. He usually beat everyone in marbles and other less popular sports because as an accomplished athlete, he excelled at just about any physical competition that took place.

An example of being a mentor, he was the baseball player who taught me how to cushion my baseball glove so it would not hurt my hand. It had been so painful and difficult until he showed me the correct way, and I never forgot it. He also was a star quarterback and crafty basketball playmaker. In a unique case, he arranged for me in my sophomore year when he was a senior to travel to school in a taxi cab. This was because he was chosen to escort a blind student who lived several blocks away from Winans Avenue to school each day.

One of the wonderful summer delights was riding on the back of his motorcycle to get slices of ice-cold watermelon on Route 22. I vividly recall us munching on those delicious treats for 25 cents a slice on those hot summer evenings. Later, when I was in junior college, he “chauffeured” my date and then returned for me on his motorcycle to Echo Lake Park for a picnic. Throughout all my schooling, he often scattered bullies who were picking on me when I walked to school. Everyone feared him, and he would say to any antagonist, “You mess with my cousin, you’re messing with me.” One day I will never forget, when I was about 14 or 15, walking with him in front of the hedges to my yard, he vaulted the tall hedges to get in the face of a very burly neighbor who was menacing my father. I forgot to say that Nemo was fearless.

He had a scholarship to play football at Alabama University. Later his adult life was spent coaching football at his alma mater, Cranford High School, and winning many county and state championships.

As older adults, I met the 75-year-old Nemo at Ferraro's restaurant in Westfield, and when we hugged good-bye, I was impressed by the still-powerful body and felt he was the same old Nemo. Sadly, he passed away unexpectedly a few weeks later. Not a cousin, but a highly admired, respected, and loved mentor, friend and neighbor.

Joe Lanza

Joe Lanza was a long-time friend of the entire Hobbie family. The way it worked out, he had periods of time with all three of the older Hobbie brothers. My turn came when I was at Davis & Elkins College, where he was finishing up his final year. I was fortunate because he was engaged to his future wife and visited home often, always stopping to pick up one of my mother's delicious care packages to deliver to me. Later in our middle ages, he joined Ernie and me playing in adult basketball and slow-pitch softball leagues. During that time, he remained the energetic sparkplug in both of those sports, never seemingly losing his zest for those exciting games.

Unfortunately, the unrelenting sands of time caught up with Joe, and he passed away in 2021, leaving his loving wife Ruth and three adult children. I vividly remember Joe and regret our loss.

Willie Cymbaluk

A fixture at the end of Winans Avenue for most of my life was the Cymbaluk Esso (Exxon) Gas Station. It was eventually run by Willie Cymbaluk, a fine mechanic and nice guy a few grades ahead of me at Cranford High School. He took over running the station from his older brother Steve many years ago, and eventually ended his family's

stewardship of that corner location just repairing cars. His family was longtime and active participants in the Cranford Police and Fire Departments.

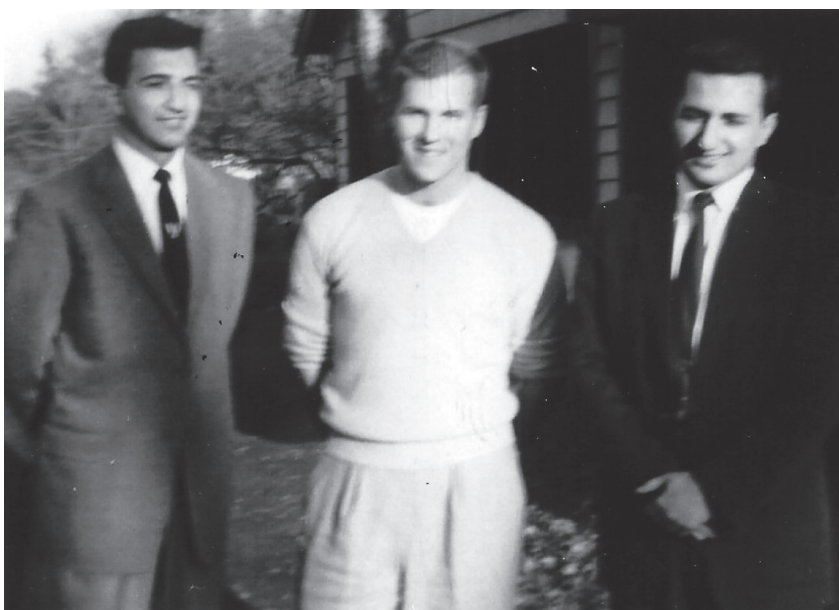
During his decades at his repair shop, he coddled, banded, and repaired the several jalopies I owned. I occasionally dropped in as he leisurely enjoyed his daily coffee klatch with several close friends.

Over the years, he had acquired truckloads of spare parts and other replacement commodities in his vast bays. In winding down his operations, he and his youngest son Donald sold some of those difficult-to-find accessories over eBay and after whittling down his voluminous cache, bought a house in southern New Jersey. He and Donald hauled many large loads of his spare parts from his soon-to-be-sold repair garage to the southern New Jersey house. I read a few years ago that he had sold his long-owned Cranford home. Sadly I received a call from Donald in 2024 that Willie had passed away.

Now when I drive out of my street, I look at the modern, multistoried building that replaced Willie's service garage. It has many apartments, stores, and a large parking area. Only in my memory...as I peel away the layers...do I see the empty lot before the Cymbaluk gas station was erected. That's one of the places where this 9-year-old kid played marbles against the other boys in the neighborhood. My, that was a long time ago.



The Hobbies and the Kiamies – the best of friends in the mid-1950s, from left: Bobby, Eddie, Ernie Hobbie; Arthur, Bobby, and Richie Kiamie; and me holding Charlie Kiamie II.



At home on a break from Davis & Elkins College, my roommate Bob Seem flanked by Ernie on the left and me on the right.



Feasting on togetherness
and Essie's bounty at
holiday get-togethers on
Winans Avenue. Here are
Essie in the front with,
from left: Jan, Ernie, Patty.



Essie enjoying the sight of her grandchildren Meg and Jerry digging in!



"The Adult Table" in the living room, from left: me, Joyce, Eddie, Bobby, Essie, Ernie, Patty.



"The Children's Table" in the dining room, from left: Karen, Meg, Chris, and Gregg facing the camera, and Teddy, Laura, and Melissa with their backs to the camera. Notice the reflections in the mirror.



At Joey's wedding reception, his uncles, from left: Eddie, Ernie, and Bobby, with Grandma Essie enjoying that sight.

Chapter 4:

My Cloak and Dagger Years

So far, I've only mentioned in passing my time in the Army in Japan. Now let's go into that in detail. Basic training in the U.S. Army in 1953 was held at several military locations throughout the country. It was a pre-requisite for those attending the Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) school at Fort Holabird, MD. I received the whole "9 yards" because after I spent a week at Fort Meade, MD, someone figured out what to do with me. I was then sent to Fort Dix, NJ, and began an 8-week basic training program. After about 3 – 4 weeks acclimating to the course, I was abruptly removed from the group and told that CIC candidates must first attend a 16-week infantry basic training course.

This meant for a few more weeks, I sort of hung around until the next 16-week cycle began. I was assigned to it at Fort Dix in one of the strangest groups ever formed. One half of the battalion were non-English, foreign citizens who were serving in the military to obtain a U.S. citizenship. They spoke no English except, as one friend quipped, "at mealtime and on payday." The other half of the unit was comprised of college graduates waiting to be admitted to the CIC school. There was no one in between. Apparently, there was a shortage of CIC agents at that time. It initially caused some resentment among those of us who had to enlist for 3 years to suddenly find many in our group could qualify for CIC with just a 2-year enrollment.

Eventually, I was very happy that I had 3 years because I received everything that had been promised me...and then some. I could never duplicate all that I was exposed to and learned in those 3 years. Other than the time I spent raising three exceptional youngsters... and watched them grow into intelligent, caring, kind, and productive adults...they were the most exciting and fulfilling years of my

life. Some of those stories I will relate to you, trying not to repeat what I already wrote two decades ago. Coincidentally, Fort Holabird is located just across the way from Western Electric's Baltimore Works. Western Electric was the parent company I joined in 1956. I've already written about the school, the courses, and leaving for Japan in my prior books.

When arriving in Yokohama, I attended Tokyo's CIC school, located in the old Kempei Tai (Japanese Secret Police) building. Later I was assigned to the Southern Region, and eventually became an agent in Yamaguchi Prefecture (state). But first, did I ever get shook up when I arrived in Japan. Try to visualize several thousand uniformed soldiers standing in formation at dockside in this new country. This 22-year-old was especially nervous because, with a group of friends, I had been discovered and chastised for gambling for money during the sea voyage over. We had all been warned that future action might be taken against us in our coming assignment. Within minutes of forming us into those military platoons, the master sergeant in charge barked out loudly, "Is there a PFC Norman Hobbie among you?" My heart must have been racing 10,000 beats per minute when I heard my name. I marched up front to the sergeant, who handed me a piece of paper that said, "Call Charlie Christian, on phone number XXX." Was I relieved to see that it was from one of my best friends in high school. When I called him later, he explained that he was working in the finance department and got a list of names and saw mine. He asked the sergeant for a favor, but I told him he almost gave me a heart attack. For the few months before he returned home, Charlie introduced me to his friends and nightlife in Tokyo.

We were billeted and ate all our meals in the Kempei Tai building, where our classes were held in learning about Japan, the language, and the customs of its people. Surprisingly, the only meals I remember eating there were the unbelievable breakfasts on the top floor. I ate more eggs over easy on toast with hash browns and delicious slices of ham steak, accompanied by huge ice-cold glasses of milk. I enjoyably downed at least two of everything in that buffet-style breakfast.

My good fortune was that because I was extremely active at that time, I only gained a little weight.

While at headquarters in Tokyo, I met and became close friends with Bob Scott, who later became a governor of North Carolina. He stayed in Tokyo all of the time he was in Japan. A few months before he was to return to the states, his father, a former North Carolina governor, was elected to the U.S. Senate. He wanted his son present at his swearing-in ceremony, and asked the Army to send Bob home for the event. Bob refused to go because some months earlier, the Army refused to allow Bob's best friend Gene a leave at home because his wife was fatally ill. In spite of Bob's refusal, the Army shipped him home anyway, and after the Senator was officially sworn in, Bob was assigned to a local CIC field office instead of being returned to Japan for his final few months.

After a few months in Tokyo, I was assigned to one of the six CIC regions. I went to Kure, the headquarters for the Southern Region. It was near Hiroshima. In fact, I had to drive through Hiroshima, which had been completely flattened by an atomic bomb. It had not been rebuilt yet, and it was difficult threading my way through it, even though it was almost 9 years after the 1945 explosion that ushered in the Atomic Age. It was getting dark, and I was completely lost in this shadow of a city. I began worrying about my fate because every time I stopped my car and tried to obtain directions, I only received very dirty and menacing looks. Finally, a man saw my plight and wrote out easy-to-follow directions on a map spread out on the hood of my car. I tried to thank him with a carton of American cigarettes from the stack in my back seat. The Japanese loved American cigarettes, especially Camels, which I had. He put up his hand, shook his head "no," and quickly walked away. I was an American driving an American Chevy. It was America that had atomic-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki 9 years earlier, and Hiroshima had yet to recover. Americans were not popular to the citizens of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

On my arrival in Kure, Al, my CIC classmate, joined me at the doorway of the commanding officer's office. The white-haired, short,

Lieutenant Colonel, looking at papers on the desk in front of him, asked me about my typing skills, and I thought, “Uh oh” because my service record said I was a qualified typist. I apologetically said that although I’m qualified, I’m not as proficient as my test reports indicate. (I wasn’t interested in spending the next 2-1/2 years as a clerk!) He scowled at me, and then asked Al the same question. And Al, who graduated #1 in the CIC class at Fort Holabird, and was also a great typist, stuck out his chest and barked out, smiling, “85 words a minute, Sir.” “Wonderful,” said the CO, and turned to the major standing next to us and said, “There’s our new company clerk.” (For those who remember, Radar in the TV show “MASH”?) Al’s smile turned dour, and he looked at me glumly. The CO turned back to me and said, “I see you were an English major in college. We’ll put you in the rewrite section.” That entailed taking agent reports from our field offices, rewriting them in better language, and sending them to Kyoto, our intermediate headquarters, who forwarded them to our Tokyo headquarters. That turned out to be my pass to becoming a field agent, my main goal.

One day, Captain Wasel Yarosh, head of the Yamaguchi Prefecture field office, was visiting Kure Headquarters, and stopped in the office where I was working with a few other rewrite men. He said, “Where’s the genius who has been rewriting my reports and making me look so good?” (Agents always got the rewritten reports back for their files.) He was a warm, personable man, and we instantly bonded. A few months later, one of his agents, Lee Tolbert, had to return to the States for a family emergency. Captain Yarosh requested me as a temporary replacement. He told me to NEVER wear a uniform, only civilian clothes, or I could never return to Yamaguchi as a bonafide CIC agent.

Everyone at his office was married except me, and they lived in government-provided houses. To accommodate me, a bedroom was established in the back room of our office, and that’s where I lived for one month. This was at Camp Bofu, a no-longer used Army base, where about 25 GIs under the command of a major maintained the

camp facilities, which included the independent housing complex. It was like a small city, with a barber shop, post office, dining hall, shopping center, etc. For some reason, the many Japanese officials that I met during that month from the police and PSIB (like our FBI) thought that I was a very important person, and treated me with a great deal of respect. (It turned out they were wise because some months later, after Captain Stone replaced Captain Yarosh, who returned to the U.S.A., Captain Stone was unexpectedly rotated back to the U.S.A. I was designated to be the Agent In Charge because there were no officers left, but I'm getting ahead of myself.)

The month in Bofu was exciting. I learned a lot, met many people, and was sad when I had to return to headquarters in Kure after Agent Tolbert returned from the States. I went back to my old job in the rewrite section, and settled in. The good news was that while editing the many agent reports, I was able to keep up with most of the investigations and activities of the Yamaguchi Field Office.

After a few months, Colonel E. Baker, head of all CIC in Japan, sent messages out to the six CIC Regions stating that anyone who had played college basketball could transfer between regions and play. I thought, "Why not?" and put in to transfer to Tokyo to try out for the headquarters team. I was accepted, and when I packed to leave, a wise friend said, "Don't take everything with you. Leave a little here." I did so, and was happy because even though I had fun and made the second team as 6th or 7th man, saw Bob Scott, and other friends a lot, I got it out of my system and wanted to return to Kure, where there was a small chance I might eventually become a field agent. Unfortunately, just at that time, Colonel Baker rescinded his order, now stating personnel could no longer transfer between regions to try out for a sports team. It appeared that I was stuck. But in a desperate attempt, I went to see the coach to plead with him for my transfer. I was so surprised when this short, red-haired man said to me, "So you were one of 'Press's boys' (Press Maravich, father of the later famous Pistol Pete Maravich, was my coach at Davis & Elkins College). It seems that Major Wroblewski had been coach of

the Wheeling, W, VA, team we played against in college. Talk about a small world! He wanted me to stay and play for his headquarters team in Tokyo that he was coaching, and told me I would be making a very big mistake in leaving. I fervently explained that I was a 3-year enlistee, not just in for 2 years, and would be in Japan for several more years. I said when I was recruited it was to be an agent, not to play basketball. I fibbed and said, "Besides, most of my belongings are still back in Kure, and I only have a few things in Tokyo." (The opposite was true.) He said reluctantly, "Hobbie, I still think you're making a big mistake, but if that's what you want, I'll backdate my authorization for you to return to Kure." (I believe I was the last CIC person to transfer between regions to play ball!)

When I returned to Kure, I was surprised to see most of the brass at the railroad station to meet me. The CO greeted me with a handshake and a smile. He told me he was pleased to have me back, and had appointed me the player/coach of the Kure CIC basketball team, which he just placed into several basketball leagues. One of them was an international league with the British, Australian, and Canadian servicemen. I was overwhelmed about the fine reception until I arrived back at camp, and learned that all the hierarchy were at the train station to see off a departing senior officer and his family. The colonel just took advantage of the fact that my Tokyo train had coincidentally arrived while they were there, so he just walked a few feet down the platform to engage the arriving Norm.

The Colonel had one goal in mind. He wanted to win a beautiful basketball trophy that he could take home with him when he retired in about 5 months. I was happy because I had my old job back after 5 weeks of fun in Tokyo, but now I was "somebody" because the Colonel made sure that all the officers, their families, and the enlisted staff attended all of our games. I was fortunate to play reasonably well. The opponents were not very good, and we hadn't lost a game. Officers who would usually call me, "Hobbie," suddenly would be asking me to meet their sons – 10 – 12-year-olds – and explain to them how they could shoot like I did. From then on, everybody called me

“Norm.” Previously, some of the officers had been very impressed with themselves and very curt to me and other subordinates. That never happened again. I played their silly game by accommodating their requests and fussing over their kids.

Things went very well in my life, and one basketball event that stood out in my mind was playing a game on a British aircraft carrier called “The Windham Bay.” It was so cool, taking an elevator a few flights down to emerge onto a basketball court. I don’t remember any detail about the game except that we won and I didn’t play very well. It felt very strange to be running up and down on a court while we were floating in Kure Bay. There were other unusual experiences because we also played many times in a league at Eta Jima, which was Japan’s Annapolis. It was located on a small island maybe 30 minutes away by landing craft off the coast of Kure. I never enjoyed the bumpy boat rides and rarely played well. The other American teams that we faced were much stronger because they had a larger group to select from and we were just a tiny CIC unit. No trophies in that league, even though the Colonel went to every game.

Life was very good, and I was reasonably happy with my “big man on campus” status until one day Captain Yarosh reappeared from the Yamaguchi Field Office and requested me to become a full-time CIC agent to replace one of the agents who had rotated home. Wow! Was this guy thrilled, and you couldn’t believe the smile on my face until the Colonel said, “No.” He wanted his trophy to take home when he retired in a few months. When I tell you I begged, pleaded with every tool in my kit (I might have even promised him my first-born when I got married) but then I changed my approach. I knew he wanted that trophy. I extolled the abilities of the team, especially Mitch Gardner from CT, who could easily fill my job as player/coach. What finally sold him is that I pledged when the playoffs were held (playoff winners got the trophy) he could transfer me back for a week, and I would suit up and lead the team to victory and we would win the trophy for him. He said, “I have your word?” I said, “Absolutely,” Now you know how much I wanted to become an

agent. I wanted the civilian clothes, a car, credentials, and an exciting job. That's what lured me into the recruiting interview when I was in college.

Captain Yarosh got his request for me, and I was one happy agent-to-be. Our logistics officer called me in and said his budget would only allow him to give me \$100 of the \$300 I was supposed to get on becoming an agent. I couldn't care less because I was going back with Captain Yarosh as one of his 6 or 7 CIC agents in that office. The next day, the logistics officer unhappily called me back into his office and shouted, "If I authorize you \$300 for clothes, can you get me receipts by tomorrow night?" (Somebody must have slapped his wrist for short-changing me!). I said that I could, and grabbed the next train to Fukuoka Prefecture, where the largest PX was located. It was on the tip of Kyushu Island, where it met Honshu Island at the bottom of Yamaguchi Prefecture at the city of Shimonoseki.

I made that long trip and purchased a suit, sports jacket, slacks, underwear, belt, ties, shoes, and still had a few dollars left over. At the end of that whirlwind buying spree, I told the checkout lady to give me enough socks to reach \$300. She smiled, threw in a bunch of them, and I grabbed the next train North. (\$300 was a lot of money in those days equivalent to about \$3,500 today, but the CIC outfitted you so you looked the part as a representative of the U.S. government.)

I turned in the receipts, and now had everything I needed to go to Yamaguchi and a career as a CIC agent. A final note about the Colonel's trophy. After a few months of extreme happiness as a CIC agent in Yamaguchi, I was ordered by the Colonel back to Kure for a week to make sure he got his trophy. I could tell from the players' faces they were not thrilled that the "heroic" agent was coming to rescue them and lead them to victory. I gathered them in a huddle and said, "I haven't touched a basketball since I played with you months ago. If I suit up to play, I will definitely make a fool of myself and we would probably lose." I told them to look at their great record, they didn't need me or anyone else for them to win the trophy for the Colonel. I said, "Get a big lead and run them off the court so the Colonel will

accept what I'm going to tell him." They smiled and I sat down next to the Colonel and said, "Look how great these guys have been. They can win without me, and if you don't let them try, you'll destroy their cohesiveness and break up this great team you built. If it's really close at the half, I'll suit up then." He bought my suggestion, and at the beginning of the game, I told the guys, "Go get them. Don't let it get close." And they did. As I sat with the Colonel, making sure he didn't get nervous and order me into the game, the team won big, the Colonel was in tears over his beautiful trophy, and I was the happiest of all as I headed back to my wonderful Yamaguchi.

When I returned, I refurbished my bedroom in the back office at Bofu. An advantage was that it was next to our photo lab, which enabled me to not only use our cameras, but also to process and print photographs. I usually ate lunch from canned tuna or salmon, saltine crackers, and cold cokes from our refrigerator. For breakfast I'd have buttered roll, which was provided for all the staff. At dinner, I ate in the Camp Bofu dining room with the 25 GIs who maintained the Camp facilities. When I was on the road, which was often, I ate in Japanese hotels or restaurants. Rarely did a day go by when I didn't partake of plenty of my favorite shrimp tempura and a large bowl of white rice with a little soy sauce. Whenever I visited the Japanese police station, I always went to lunch with the Chief and one or two of his staff. We alternated hosting the meals. The evening meals were a big deal, and the Chief would have 4 – 5 key members of his staff in attendance. Much sake would be drunk with many toasts being made back and forth.

A major rule about Camp Bofu was that non-American nationals could not drive into the camp unescorted. They had to be met by U.S. personnel. This is, except for Governor Ozawa and his large Cadillac. He could go anywhere! After I became a full-time CIC agent, lived at Camp Bofu and pitched for the camp baseball team, one day in the middle of a game, I saw Governor Ozawa's blue Cadillac drive up to the batting cage and park behind it. His chauffeur was driving, and he sat in the back. After my inning of pitching was over, I walked

over to the Cadillac to pay my respects to the Governor. He rolled down the window, and with a big smile on his face, said, "Hobbie-san. You are a good pitcher. You struck out all three batters." (The Japanese had difficulty hitting my best pitch – a big, breaking curve ball. Unfortunately, that was my only good pitch. As my high school baseball coach used to lament, "Hobbie, your fast ball can't break a glass window!") I said to the Governor, "Thank you, but I have much more enthusiasm than I do talent. But I enjoy the game very much." I don't recall the rest of the conversation, but he stayed around until I batted in the next inning, and then the car drove off. When I next saw his daughter Junie, she related his conversation about the incident, when he told her that I was a good athlete and reminded him of himself when he was a young man. Apparently, he loved to play baseball as a youngster, and that's why he was watching the game.

This next event happened soon after I had moved permanently to Yamaguchi Prefecture. I put on sneakers, got a basketball, and drove over to a nearby Japanese middle school. Next to the school was a well-marked, outdoor basketball court. To get some practice and exercise, I began dribbling up and down the court, making lay-ups at each end. Then began practicing my two-handed set shots. It took me a while to get my eye, and the ball began swishing through the nets. After I had made several long shots in a row, I heard applause, clapping and cheering. When I looked up towards that sound, I saw many students leaning out of the third-floor windows, waving and shouting encouragement at this American shooting baskets on their playground court. I was embarrassed because I realized that I was disrupting their classes, and several teachers were probably unhappy with me. I stopped, waved at the students, put my hands on my knees, and bowed several times toward each group out of respect for what they had done. Then, amid their "No!" I waved good-bye, picked up the ball, walked to my car, and drove away. I never went back to shoot baskets there again.

Now for the story that almost got me court-martialed by my Kure Operations Officer. It was late 1955, and America had selected

a small portion of Yamaguchi Prefecture to use as a bombing practice area. (They would dump sacks with dye, not real bombs.) The name of the place was Akiyoshi Plateau, and it was an important religious area with shrines and temples, which made it sacredly sensitive. Every single Japanese group (rightists, leftists, socialists, communists, labor, etc.) was against us. It unified the whole prefecture against the American guests. Governor Ozawa was in a difficult battle to be re-elected. He and his older daughter Junie were crisscrossing the prefecture, giving speeches and campaigning to get votes. The number one issue was the scheduled bombing of Akiyoshi Plateau. My trusted interpreter, Matt, told me that the Governor's staff suggested I not visit the Mansion until the issue became resolved. That was the smart thing to do, and I couldn't understand why we did not offer an alternative location. There were plenty of good places in the prefecture and other areas of Japan.

I notified my Kure Headquarters Operations Officer that I intended to give the Governor a wide berth for a few weeks until the heat from those protests died down. The Major told me that I was wrong, and he wanted me to go to this pro-American governor and DEMAND that he convince his people to stop protesting. I told him that was the worst thing we could do...that he could ask us to leave his Prefecture because, as I had been told many times in orientation classes in Tokyo when I first landed, that we were guests of the country. He asked me if I was disobeying a direct order from him, and that I could be court-martialed for it. I said, "No. I believe you're wrong. And if I do what you want, we will be booted out of the prefecture, which would be a huge problem for the United States." I wasn't refusing; I was asking to speak to someone higher in CIC.

The Commanding Officer at Kure was now a major (the Colonel had by now gone home with his trophy), was the Operations Officer's current boss and would do anything that he told him. The Operations Officer said, "My boss agrees with me." And I responded,

"I mean Headquarters Tokyo when I said your boss because that's who will bear the brunt of the problem if I do what you want me

to do. If Headquarters Tokyo tells me to do it, I will comply. I am questioning your decision.” Our discussion had become very heated.

At the time, I was living at the Iwakuni Naval Base and he was in Kure. There was a small boat that went back and forth between the two. He ordered me ASAP to take the next boat to Kure so that he could confront me fact-to-face with his boss. I agreed, and tried to get a booking, but was told because of rough seas they wouldn't be in business until the next morning. I relayed this to my Operations Officer, and whether he checked or not, he told me to get the first boat in the morning. Very early the next morning, he called me and told me not to come to Kure, and to just keep observing the situation. (My guess he called somebody in Tokyo, and the person told him that I was correct and to leave it alone.) A few weeks later, I received a commendation letter from Colonel Baker in Tokyo, and there was an endorsement added to it from the Commanding Office at Kure. My first reaction was, “I'm being bought off because had I been dumb enough to do what they asked me to, I believe they both would have been removed from their assignments and returned to the States.”

When I returned to the States, I subscribed to a Japanese publication called “The Asahi Shimbun,” which covered events in Japan. Years later the Americans withdrew their request to use Akiyoshi Plateau for practice bombing and went elsewhere. What took them so long, I'll never know.

In my opinion, that was not the only time that the CIC did not display wisdom. Later when I was debriefed in Tokyo on my way home, I was asked for my suggestions. I gave two. One was, once a person became an agent, never force them to use their actual military title when they go to a doctor or dentist. The other thing is if you are an agent and going home, allow the agent to wear civilian clothes until they reach the base from which they will be discharged. Because I was wearing my enlisted man's uniform, I ducked my head aboard my troopship because I saw military family members aboard the ship who knew me as a CIC agent, not Specialist Norm Hobbie. I was trying to protect the ranks of the agents still on assignment. As an

example of why it's so important that the rank not be compromised occurred earlier when I arrived in Bofu. I was lucky because what saved me was the camp baseball team did not have a pitcher, and even though I was only a so-so pitcher, I had a good curve ball and met their needs.

We played in several leagues, and had some limited success but a lot of fun, and I made one very good friend, the camp Postmaster. One day he approached me, and slipped me a letter from a woman at Trinity Church in Cranford, saying, "I don't think you want anybody to see this." The letter was addressed to PFC Hobbie. My rank was classified because in my work I had to deal with very high-level people. My authority came from my credentials and title of CIC Agent. Because of this role, I had officer-type privileges, such as living in the BOQ, eating in the Officers Club, so the people in the neighborhood did not know I was an enlisted man. If the postal clerk's boss ever saw that letter, I would be behind a desk because his boss, a Major, disliked the fact that I didn't report to him. I was a Department of the Army Civilian (DAC) living on his base, and it galled him. His favorite ploy was to come up behind me at dinnertime, rub my then-thick head of hair, and ask how his favorite agent was doing. I kept my mouth shut and smiled when he was goading me, which angered him even more. I thanked the Postmaster profusely, wrote home ASAP, and told Essie to immediately notify everyone she knew to never write me again...and never to give my address to anyone outside the family. That rank was my rank during early basic training and someone got my new CIC address, coupled it with my early rank, and sent that unwelcome letter. My joining the camp baseball team and bonding with the Postmaster saved my bacon. He and I were the best two hitters. I batted third and he batted cleanup. I got on base often, and he usually drove me in with a double or triple. He could run like a deer. I believe our offensive collaboration probably earned me his loyalty. He never mentioned the subject again, and I doubt that he ever told anyone.

Another incident in which my classified rank was almost compromised came a few months later. I needed dental work, and had

it done at a nearby Army base...those were the rules. I was living in the BOQ in Iwakuni, but was required to go miles away to the nearest Army base, where an officer drilled my teeth. I had to sign in as an enlisted man, Army Specialist, not a CIC DAC. Weeks later, that dental officer and his wife were having dinner with friends at the Iwakuni Officers Club. As I was eating dinner at a nearby table, I noticed four people glaring at me, and that one of them was my dentist. He was doing most of the talking, and was very upset. If we had a scene, I could have had my classified rank compromised and been removed from the field. I quickly walked over to their table, said hello, and asked the dentist if I could speak with him privately. He angrily got up and followed me to a private area and for one of the few times as an agent, I flashed my credentials and told him to read them. (They were the most powerfully worded credentials, written in English and Japanese, that if God read them, he would do whatever was asked.) I then reminded the shook-up dentist that my rank was classified information and if he should ever divulge it, he could be court-martialed and imprisoned. (Of course, he had already told his wife and the other couple.) I asked if he understood me. He assured me that he would never tell a soul. I smiled and said, "I know you won't." We returned to our respective tables, and it was fun watching him tell the others to be quiet and he would tell them later what had transpired. They all smiled at me when they left shortly thereafter.

Remember when I first arrived in Kure and Al and I were interviewed and he became the Company Clerk? Well, a year later, I was able to help him, and he probably never knew it. It was a short time before the Colonel in Kure was scheduled to return to the States. I was now in charge of the Yamaguchi Field Office, and the Colonel and I were very comfortable with each other. I was attending a two-day briefing session at Headquarters Kure, when the Colonel took me aside and confided, "Norm. I got a big problem. The agent in Shikoku (an island off the coast of Honshu) is going back to the States next week, and I have no one I can trust to replace him in that important job." I looked at him and said, "Of course you do! Your

clerk Al graduated number one in my CIC class at Fort Holabird, and you've been using him as the Company Clerk. He's got the intelligence and personality to be a great agent in Shikoku working with no supervision." The Colonel lit up like a pinball machine, patted me on the back, and walked away smiling. The next day, Al stopped me and said, "Guess who's going to be our new CIC Agent in Shikoku?" I knew the answer from the huge grin on his face. I just said, "How wonderful! It's long overdue, and you're going to be great!" In a way, Al was letting me know you couldn't keep a good man down after two incidents in his life that I was involved in: The day I avoided becoming the Company Clerk and he got the job, and later when I told him his now-former Japanese girlfriend had told me he was just her ticket to the U.S.

We never spoke again, and I hope he had a very good life.

Another interesting experience occurred in 1955, while I was still living at Camp Bofu. I was now the Agent-in-Charge, and was given a house on the camp grounds to be both my field office and living quarters. That meant my assistant, Pete Kalitka, and I each had bedrooms, and the third was converted into our office with file cabinets and desks for two interpreters and a secretary. We had to secure the office room with combination locks because we had classified material in some of our files. After the office was ready to become operational, we hired Captain Stone's former maid, 66-year-old Ueda-san. She spoke some English, but I insisted she only talk to us in Japanese. It helped us tremendously in becoming much more fluent in the Japanese language. It also helped me years later when I was teaching communications at Kean University. Two Spanish students who spoke very little English hung out together and only spoke Spanish to each other. I separated them, explained they should try very hard to only speak English, and they both rapidly improved, and thanked me at the end of the semester.

Our headquarters in Kyoto sent a Lieutenant Colonel down to inspect our new office to see if we met CIC standards. I picked him up at the railroad station, fed him, watched as he thoroughly

inspected the entire house, including talking to the other agent, Pete, and Ueda-san. Afterwards, I drove him back to the railroad station to catch his train north. He told me that we had passed the inspection with flying colors. Then he added, "Your choice of that older woman sealed the deal. If you had yourself a 21-year-old beauty with all that classified material around, I would be writing a much different kind of report. Keep up the good work, Agent Hobbie."

One of my CIC liaison contacts that I inherited from Captain Stone was Mr. Tawarada, CEO of Ube-Kosan, a huge pharmaceutical company that employed many, many people in the city of Ube, Yamaguchi. I had previously attended dinner at his mansion with Captain and Mrs. Stone, and they cautioned me to just pick because of the volume of food that would be served. They weren't kidding because it was a full 6-course dinner, so I tried to eat just a little bit of every serving. It was difficult because everything was so delicious. At the end of the sumptuous meal, several of his children entertained us with the violin and flute. Mr. Tawarada turned to me smiling and asked me, "What is your favorite recording?" On one wall of our huge room were thousands of records slotted into their jackets on shelves from floor to ceiling. There was a portable ladder (like in a shoe store) that could traverse from side to side so that one could access any shelf on the wall. I hesitated and thought and then said, "O Sole Mio, sung by Enrico Caruso, a rendition I remember from my childhood when I first heard it on an old Victrola. It often brought tears to my eyes even though I did not understand the words being sung." Mr. Tawarada walked over to the metal ladder, moved it several feet to his left, climbed up the ladder and extracted a record and climbed down to place it on a beautiful turntable. He smiled at me, placed the needle on the rotating record, and watched my face light up as Enrico Caruso, in a very old recording, treated us to his most famous recording. I'm not sure who was more pleased, me or Mr. Tawarada. By the way, that was not his real surname. When the founder of Ube-Kosan died, he left the company to his two beautiful daughters, now in their mid-40s. One of them married a Lance

Corporal in the Army, who took the famous Tawarada surname of the original owner and became the new CEO. I had met those two women who had such great poise and were elegant. I have never seen such beauty and composure in another human being. Our host was one fortunate man. In Japan men often take their wife's name if needed to continue the lineage.

Another vivid memory was after Camp Bofu closed and I was living at the Iwakuni Naval Air Base. My BOQ sleeping quarters looked out onto the airplane runways, and it took me a while to get used to the incoming/outgoing flights. One evening, I was looking out of my screened-in bathroom window at the sight of new jets taking off and landing on a nearby runway. I was fascinated by the blinking lights and roaring engines. However, I also noticed several hated mosquitoes trying to get through the screening on the open windows. A mean thought came to mind. I smoked cigars and pipes, using a unique Zippo lighter to light them. If I tilted the lighter when it was flaming, the flame shot out like a laser beam, which was especially helpful in lighting a pipe. So, I decided to "fry" those pesky mosquitoes which were trying to get through the screen and bite me. I tilted the lighter and put my improvised blowtorch against the screen and inscribed a circular motion. To my astonishment, when I moved the lighter away from the screen, I was staring at a hole in the screen the size of a quarter. All I could think of was mosquitoes pouring through that hole later in the evening when I had gone to sleep. I quickly grabbed some toilet paper and stuffed the hole while I searched for tape. I had to settle for a couple of band aids to temporarily cover the hole until the screen could be repaired. The next day, I called Maintenance and had them replace the screen. The lesson I learned was don't mess with something that's doing no harm.

Another memory of Iwakuni in 1955 when an American aircraft carrier docked for several weeks of repairs, I became good friends with one of the pilots billeted near me, and he told me that he had to fly practice routes during their stay-over. He offered me a ride in his plane, but I declined, telling him I was prone to motion sickness.

He promised me that I would enjoy a smooth ride, and I finally relented. He had added the fact that he was willing to fly over my entire prefecture so that I could view it more closely. I went with him and his crew, and we sat way up front with the wings far behind us. I was fascinated when he demonstrated how they search for submarines with a special technique and equipment. When we flew over the prefecture, I was reminded where it got its name. Yama meant mountain. I didn't get airsick because he would tell me each time the plane changed position and to expect certain pressure or sensation each time. It was a profitable experience.

Another very unusual experience happened in 1955 or 1956. The year was labeled something like "the geophysical year." Many containers of scientific equipment were carried by huge balloons all over the world collecting data wherever they landed. The highest priority was given to their recovery. I was notified by Headquarters CIC that one of those precious containers had landed in a remote area of Yamaguchi Prefecture, my area of responsibility. The goal was to find them, recover them, and take possession until the military could send a large truck and a crew to retrieve the container. Harold Kuhara, a Nisei interpreter, and I made the long drive to the West, went up very high mountains, and when the road ended walked quite a distance in the blistering hot sun to claim the container from the local village people. Nobody spoke English in those boondocks, and we stayed in the only rooming house in town for two days waiting for an army truck and crew to arrive. I had difficulty getting a decent breakfast because they had no clue about eggs over easy, so I ate a hard-boiled egg with Japanese tea and thick slices of a tasty bread. While waiting, the villagers taught me to play go moko-narabi, which was a simplified version of the Japanese board game Go.

I just realized that 1955 was an extremely busy and diverse year for me in Japan. I had a most interesting assignment. Whenever a VIP toured my prefecture, Yamaguchi, I would be responsible for their protection until they left. General Lyman Lemnitzer visited Yamaguchi Prefecture accompanied by his bodyguard officer in civilian

clothes. The responsible CIC field agent from each prefecture would always augment the security by shadowing the person until he left.

This was at the beginning of General Lemnitzer's assignment as the final military governor of Allied Occupied Japan. He toured the country to get a better understanding of the scope of his pending 2-year assignment. He had had an illustrious career during World War II helping to plan the invasion of North Africa and Sicily, and would go on to become the only person in history to serve as Army Chief of Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Supreme Allied Commander of NATO.

I found it both amusing and exasperating that during that assignment I was forbidden to have any bullets in my 38-caliber revolver. When I asked my colonel why such an illogical rule when I needed to protect the man, I was told that a few years earlier, a CIC agent had drunk too much at a bar and flashed his gun, terrifying the patrons, who all sought cover. Therefore, a new rule: You could not have bullets in your gun. His visit went without incident, and I was happy to see him leave the prefecture in one piece.

In these last few years, I have read several stories about a younger General Lemnitzer, who was involved in life-threatening situations, where he stepped up and saved the day by his courage and bravery. I knew none of this on the day I was helping out his tight-lipped bodyguard.

In 1955, while I was still living in Camp Bofu, I almost became an alcoholic. Many nights I had dinner in the camp dining hall with the GIs who were stationed there to maintain the now-defunct camp, which also contained about 30 private homes. Some of the residents were officers and their families who were deployed elsewhere and commuted to Camp Bofu most weekends. The bar was always open before dinner, and with many others I made it a habit of having a few drinks prior to our evening meal. What I didn't realize was that eventually those few Scotch and sodas that I drank became three and then four Scotch and sodas. To my surprise, each one tasted better after the first one and was a smoother drink. That was as close as I could

come to being an alcoholic and what actually saved me was meeting the two oldest children of Governor and Tomiko Ozawa. Here's how that story played out.

MY CO's wife Ruth invited me to her 5-year-old daughter's birthday party. She asked me to drive to the main gate and pick up Governor Ozawa's 5-year-old daughter Akiko, who arrived in this Cadillac chaperoned by his oldest daughter, Junie. The Governor's first wife had died and he remarried Tomiko Tanaka, granddaughter of a famous general and former prime minister of Japan. The Governor also had a son Toshiro and two daughters, Junie and Natsuko, by his first wife. Toshiro and Junie attended college in Tokyo, but Junie was in Yamaguchi often because her 30-year-old stepmother had a bad heart and could not assist the Governor by hosting parties, campaigning for reelection, and similar activities. Junie stood in as First Lady of Yamaguchi Prefecture. She was 22, Toshiro was 24, and Natsuko was 17 or 18. They also had a younger brother whose name I have forgotten. I provided you that background because the Ozawa family was extremely important to me for the next two years.

When I picked up Akiko and Junie at the main gate, I had no idea what the future would bring. Apparently, Junie and I had no problem communicating, even though she spoke very little English and I very little proper Japanese. She asked her father to request that I give her English lessons, which he did and I most certainly agreed. I became a frequent visitor to the huge Governor's Mansion, and whenever Toshiro was home from college, he would join us. In fact, later when our office got smaller and I was living at the Iwakuni Naval Air Base, he visited me during a Spring Break of one week from college, but that's another story.

My main work was the liaison with the Japanese Police and PSIB. It was very difficult because we were guests of Japan by 1955, no longer an occupying force. We could not demand information. Up to this point, my agent reports reporting my activities were scarce because my requests for information from these investigative agencies was met with token products, which often left many unanswered

questions. Governor Ozawa was the most powerful person in Yamaguchi Prefecture. What he said counted tremendously. Our English lessons began and were extremely successful, as was evidenced by Junie's speech improving quickly and demonstrably. The Governor and his wife were very pleased, and let me know. More importantly, the Japanese Police and PSIB began to be extremely cooperative, flooding me with so much information that my agent reports soon became among the most productive in all 6 CIC Regions. While spending time giving Junie English lessons in the Governor's Mansion, we talked about everything in the world. Art, music, history, the Atomic Bomb, Japan, America, etc., etc. And we also played a lot of ping pong. We played with her siblings and the large house staff. We began to excel at doubles and lost to no one as a team. Unknown to me, she was improving my Japanese, which had been very feminine because I learned a lot of it in Tokyo bars talking to the bar girls. She would laugh at me and say, "You speak like a girl." After months, my ability in the Japanese language improved, and years later when I returned from Japan I was at a party in New York City with Japanese people. They commented that I spoke a very fine style of Japanese. (Thank you, Junie!) As I was helping improve her English, I wasn't aware that she was improving my Japanese.

Another memorable event was when I was in Iwakuni standing under the famous Kintai-kyo Bridge. It has five arches! Toshiro Ozawa was home from college for a week, and Governor Ozawa asked me if Toshiro could visit with me at the Iwakuni Naval Air Base where I was now living and working. I had a small field office on the base for my staff of Pete Kalitka, two interpreters, and our secretary. I was sleeping in the BOQ on the base, so I called the Base Billeting Officer and explained the request but unfortunately, he was tied to red tape and said the policy did not allow foreign nationals to stay in the BOQ. I tried to explain that his boss, a Navy captain who commanded the base, knew the Governor personally and I had been to a dinner where both of them attended. He told me not to tell him how to do his job. After hanging up, I telephoned the Captain's Public

Relations Officer, who was thrilled at the prospect that the Governor wanted his son to visit the base for a week, and told me he would take care of it. Twenty minutes later I got a phone call from the Billeting Officer telling me that I had not explained the significance of the visit, and asked for details like name, time of arrival, expected departure, etc. He was very happy to have Governor Ozawa's son stay at the base. I laughed to myself, provided the details, and obtained the room number and location. Toshiro and I had much fun that week as we visited bars and the sights of the nearby city of Iwakuni, and we built very fond memories. He took my favorite photo of me – the one standing under the bridge.

What you don't know is the story behind that photograph. Toshiro suggested that we rent one of the boats and row in the waters under that famous bridge. What he didn't know was how terrified I was, couldn't swim very well, and feared tipping over and drowning. He sat back comfortably in the rowboat and asked me to row. The current was swift and was going to send us far away from where we were, so I had to fiercely keep rowing just to stay in place and not be swept away. The more effort I exerted, the harder he laughed sitting opposite me, not knowing my great fear. Eventually, I was able to nudge the boat near shore and we jumped out, and he was still laughing. It had to have happened after the photo was taken because I look too cool and calm in that picture which was not my demeanor when I came to shore.

As a result of Toshiro's one-week visit to the Iwakuni Naval Air Base, and my continuing lessons with his sister Junie and himself, the three of us emerged as very close friends, often debating long and hard about our two different cultures. To this day, I often wonder how fate treated them during these ensuing almost 70 years, hoping their lives were successful and fulfilling.

Recently I looked at a photograph of me sitting on the deck outside the Officers Club sipping a cold Schlitz beer and looking at the Pacific Ocean, reviewing my then-24-year-old life and wondering about my future. I was all alone, and just imagining all my loved

ones at home, oceans away, going about their daily activities at 90 Winans Avenue. I was very relaxed and was just peeking in on them, hoping they were all well. I was missing those wonderful people who I had not seen for too many years. If you now leap forward all these decades, you will understand that all the adults who were waiting for me in the U.S. are no longer with us.

Other folks I'll never forget
Taro Ozawa

Governor Ozawa of Yamaguchi Prefecture in Japan was one of the true giants in my life. His physical appearance was a picture of power, strength and leadership. His title of Governor did not diminish any of those characteristics. I first met him in 1954 at a meeting in Yamaguchi when I filled in for a CIC agent who was back in the United States on an emergency leave for one month. My recollection was the Governor's warm smile instantly made me comfortable in his presence. There was no doubt he represented the most power that existed in that room.

Months later, when I became a full-time CIC agent in Yamaguchi, he always treated me well, and made me confident about my assignment. My status greatly improved when I accepted his request to coach his daughter Juniko and occasionally son Toshiro in the English language. If ever there was a win-win situation that was it because my ability to speak Japanese greatly improved in the process of me tutoring them in English. Additionally, as I probably mentioned elsewhere in this book, the Governor encouraged the Japanese police and other investigative agencies to make available information that made my work easier and more rewarding. It made all the difference in my carrying out my CIC responsibilities.

I ran into the Governor in many different places, sometimes on those dusty, dirt roads where only one car could pass.

He instructed his chauffeur to pull over and allow me to continue. I tried to defer the gesture, but he would always insist upon it. Years later, shortly after I had begun work at Western Electric, Kearny, my dear friend Governor Ozawa visited the United States on a tour. I believe he was looking for business opportunities for his constituents in Yamaguchi Prefecture. In addition to that esteemed title, his wife was the granddaughter of a former famous general and prime minister.

In discussing my work as a writer at this huge manufacturing plant, he asked me If he could visit the plant for a tour of the cable-making and other equipment facilities. I was elated and told him I would make the arrangements. Unfortunately I had no idea how little my upper management understood the importance of this powerful foreign government official. My immediate supervisor discussed it with his assistant manager, who welcomed the idea.

As we grew closer to the tour date, I anxiously asked if the General Manager of Kearny had been apprised of the visit. To my surprise and shock, I was informed that my middle manager was preparing to host the visit. I tried to explain that they did not understand the protocol required and they needed to inform the very top level of management of the impending visit. Nothing changed, and on the date of the visit I told my boss that I intended to cancel the visit rather than to humiliate Governor Ozawa. This was not easy for me because I was a relatively new, low-ranked employee. My message was passed on, and soon our director, the #2 man in the plant hierarchy, was appointed to host the tour. I felt that it would work, and in the meantime the governor had requested that an interpreter be provided. When I said to him that he shouldn't have a problem communicating because he spoke English very well, he smiled and said, "It is necessary because people expect that people of my rank should be flawless in expressing my views." I immediately understood his

message and was able to contact a Nisei engineer who fit the role perfectly.

The tour went smoothly, and then our director, after we had lunch in the special dining room, excused himself and told Governor Ozawa that our manager would continue with the tour. It was at that same moment that Governor Ozawa looked at his watch, thanked him for his time and courtesy, but realized he had another appointment and would have to abruptly leave. (There was no way Governor Ozawa was going to allow himself to be handed off to a subordinate!) Photographs were made for the record, and Governor Ozawa departed.

During that same visit to the United States, my wife Jo and I visited the Empire State Building and the U.N. Plaza with the Governor. He took many photographs and films for home consumption to share with his family when he returned to Japan.

Rummaging through some old letters, I found information about Governor Ozawa that I had completely forgotten. After serving another term as Governor, he ran for and was elected to Congress in Japan, where he served several terms.

I will never forget the kindness he and his family showed me in my years in Japan.

Wasel Yarosh

“Rush,” as he was called by all who knew him, was an exceptional human being. He had an extremely warm, engaging personality. He had more self-confidence than most people I’ve known. As a strong leader, he made me feel more like a colleague instead of one of his many subordinates. His infectious smile and quick sense of humor enabled everyone in his sphere to relax and feel very comfortable. He was in charge of the CIC operation in Yamaguchi Prefecture until

he left a year after my arrival. His likeable personality was complemented by his wife Mabelle. Their children, Mark and Sharon, provided an intelligent but quiet background for their parents' outgoing demeanor. Rush had been instrumental in selecting me to become an agent from my staff writing assignment at CIC Headquarters in Kure.

He took me with him and introduced me to the various Japanese officials I would work with as I became more engaged in the CIC field office at Camp Bofu. Obtaining his analysis of each operation made it easy for me to smoothly become a part of his multifaceted operation. I was able to avoid the pitfalls of most people who are trying to find their niche in a busy, challenging operation which was totally new to them.

When I returned from Japan, he was working in Washington, D.C. in one of the intelligence operations located there. He arranged for me to be interviewed by the FBI and CIA while staying at his home outside Washington. His kindness and support will never be forgotten. When I last knew about the Yarosh family, Rush was still working in Intelligence in Washington, D.C.

Moriichi Matsubashi

During the time I lived in Japan I worked with several translator/interpreters to enable me to perform my duties as a CIC agent. As I've mentioned, my mutual language tutoring arrangement with Juniko Ozawa greatly improved my grasp of the Japanese language. That made working with an interpreter much easier.

Of the different Japanese nationals we employed in our Camp Bofu CIC office, I found "Matt" Matsubashi to be not only the best interpreter, but we developed a close friendship as colleagues. In fact, after I returned home in June 1956, we continued to correspond for a number of years.

Initially, when I was assigned to the Camp Bofu CIC office, Matt asked my assistance to tutor his youngest son, who was going to America in the near future to attend college. He would be joining his two older brothers, who previously had embarked on a similar journey and were either still in college or had married and were residing in the United States. Because I had a limited time to work with Matt's son, I focused on the value of the yen vs. the dollar, the customs that were very different between the cultures, and that sort of advice. I'm sure his older brothers took him under their wing and helped him to acclimate after he arrived. The few times Matt mentioned him after that was, "Everything is going well."

I remember an unusual event that involved Matt. I had been invited by the Yamaguchi Chief of Police to join him and several members of his staff in my first mushroom hunt. We had a fun outing, and at the end, I was presented with a very large basket filled to the top with choice mushrooms. I turned to Matt afterwards and because I had yet to appreciate what a delicious dish I had been given...and really didn't have the means or knowledge how to clean and prepare them...I really had no need for them. Matt said, "I will be very glad to take them, Hobbie-san. My wife will be very, very happy." I must note that over 50 years later, I have bought, cleaned, prepared, and eaten countless numbers of mushrooms, and only now at this juncture do I fully realize how happy I made Matt's family that day!

Duane Stranahan

Duane was someone I met in basic training in Ft. Dix, New Jersey. He was just one of those "cool" guys you encounter in your travels. He arrived with quite a pedigree. His family owned Champion Spark Plugs, headquartered in Toledo, Ohio. He was movie star handsome, intelligent, personable,

and an incredible leader. I believe he was our platoon leader in basic training, and always carried himself with strength and confidence. Like the time he convinced a couple of us fellow hungry GIs to raid the mess hall at midnight for a delicious snack. I loved cheese in those days, and vividly remember eating more than my share of cheese, bread and ice-cold milk. Sure, we were caught and slightly reprimanded. But in Duane's company, it seemed worthwhile.

Another time, the company was restricted to quarters for the weekend because we weren't meeting our CO Lieutenant's standard of performance. I can see that event of 1953 as though it was yesterday. Duane's lovely pregnant wife had flown in the corporate plane from Ohio and was standing in the company area while the very uncomfortable lieutenant was addressing his gathered attentive company. It seems that Mrs. Stranahan had met with our CO, explaining that she had flown from Ohio to Ft. Dix to spend a few hours with her husband. As I recall, the CO tried to explain to the 300 basic training group that he had decided to give us another chance to live up to his expectations and was, therefore, rescinding his orders that restricted us to the company area. There were loud cheers from the company, and we were very grateful to Mrs. Stranahan for bringing about our "good fortune."

I didn't see much of Duane during our time at Fort Holabird, but we were on the same troop ship that went to Japan. It was there that he "highjacked" me to become their fourth in a bridge game that we played often...when I wasn't seasick. While in Japan, a CIC friend from Pittsburgh told me that Duane took him home to Ohio one weekend, and that the Stranahan family treated him "exceptionally well," that they were very regular people, who were not impressed by their wealth. During our time in Tokyo, I saw very little of Duane, and I understand that his wife flew over and lived with him in Tokyo. When I was sent out to the field location to become an agent, I lost all contact with him.

I recently read that Duane had passed away in 2021 at the age of 90 in Naples, Florida. As I reflect on my brief several-year relationship with Duane, I consider him to be one of the most intelligent, friendly, life-loving persons I have ever known.

Ted Henning

Ted was the Interrogations Instructor at Fort Holabird in CIC School. The class was especially important to me because up to that time I had found that all of my classes were difficult. I made matters worse because I missed my family, and especially my mother's great cooking, so I went home every weekend instead of applying myself to that very tough material. I also socialized with my classmates, going to bars on East Baltimore Street, which took more of my time. At Fort Holabird, the rule was: If you flunk three classes, you would be dropped from CIC School and sent to the Infantry. I did poorly on my first two exams, and suddenly realized I could lose out from this exciting program unless I changed my ways. Therefore, I stopped going home and to the bars, and began hitting the books.

The best thing that happened was the next course was called Interrogations, and I met this tall, intelligent human being, Ted Henning, who spoke with a strong German accent. His class was one of the very best I have ever taken. I believe I received a 92 in the class, and that was the turning point in my days at Fort Holabird. Now that I knew I could master the courses, I continued to work hard and finish the program with decent averages in all the other courses. It was Ted Henning's course, and his light, enjoyable banter that made his material easy to assimilate and gave me the confidence that I needed.

That wasn't the end of the story, though. That year was 1953. Twenty years later, In 1973, I was transferred from Western Electric's Safeguard Project in North Carolina to its Kearny Works in New Jersey. Fort Holabird had closed in

1961, and my guess is that at some point Ted Henning physically went across the street to Western Electric's Baltimore Works and obtained a job. Why do I say that? Because in 1973, when I was Kearny's Human Resources Manager, I received a surprise visit one day when the tap on my office door revealed an older, tired-looking Ted Henning. As happy as I was to see this exceptionally fine gentleman, I was puzzled about his presence. He must have told me how he became a Western Electric employee, but I have completely forgotten this 50-year-old story.

What he did tell me was that he was a section chief in one of the busy manufacturing shops, and disliked the environment. To me, he certainly deserved to be in a working area that could use his many talents more than a shop supervisor. While I was trying to think about a way to transfer this talented, brilliant person to one of my many people-oriented positions, he gave me the bad news that he was dying, and did not have much time to live. He then asked me if I could do him a favor. His wife, foreign-born I believe, did not understand Western Electric's death benefit plan, and was upset about her future raising their daughter. The Benefit Department was one of my responsibilities, so Ted hoped I could help them out. I obtained directions to his house somewhere in South Jersey, asked my subject-matter-expert supervisor to join me, and drove down to the Hennings. All the forms were explained to Mrs. Henning. She was given the appropriate contact numbers, and we returned to Kearny. Ted did not last very long, but everything had been taken care of, and his family was able to sign up for all the survivor benefits. I just wish it could have been a better ending, one that enabled him to be transferred to my organization to a job more appropriate to his outstanding abilities. Ted Henning certainly turned my CIC career around and I hope that I was able to give him some peace at the end.



My high school buddy Charlie Christian giving me my initiation to Tokyo nightlife during my first week in Japan.



Me working out behind the Kempei Tai building, which served as CIC headquarters school in Tokyo. I'm holding a manacle that captured American pilots were chained to during WW II to prevent Americans from bombing the Japanese Secret Police.



My basketball teammates
in Japan, from left: Jim
Carr and Mitch Gardner.



Wasel Yarosh, my CIC
Field Office CO.



My baseball team in Japan. On the far left is the postmaster who saved my job by alerting me to a letter from home that disclosed my rank against army regulations.



President Tawarada, of Ube Kosan, a pharmaceutical company, and President of the Opera Society that featured one of my favorites Japanese operas: Tsuru.



Police Chief Nagaoka of the Yamaguchi Prefecture Police, who was later promoted to Chief of all Japanese police. He was highly intelligent, had a wonderful sense of humor, and we were very comfortable with one another.

Governor Taro Ozawa, Governor of Yamaguchi Prefecture and later served several terms in the Japanese Congress. I had deep respect and admiration for him.





Governor Ozawa's children and great friends of mine, from left: Toshiro, Juniko, Natsuko, don't remember this brother's name, and Akiko.



The second Mrs. Ozawa on the right, from the Tanaka family (her father had been Prime Minister and also was a general), her stepdaughter Juniko and me.



Governor Ozawa's oldest and youngest daughters,
Juniko and Akiko.



A very moving farewell dinner hosted by Governor Ozawa, his wife and daughter,
and several members of the Yamaguchi Prefecture leadership on the occasion
of my departure from Japan.

Chapter 5:

Return from Japan

When I returned from Japan, 14 more days at sea. I slept on the deck because the smell below would have gotten me sick. It was cold, and I tied the arm of the field jacket I wore to metal pieces welded to the deck. I feared rolling off the ship in my sleep.

Coming home in late June 1956, and seeing the family was a huge high! Giddo's tears moved me the most. After a few days, I went down to Washington, D.C., where Captain Yarosh got me an interview with the FBI and CIA. The last interviewer at the CIA told me it was very promising, and I would hear from them within a week. After a month, I told myself to forget about this. I went to a Western Electric interview at Kearny, arranged by Charlie Kiamie, a neighbor and a dear friend, and got the job. I started my career there on October 1, 1956. No one helped me with the transition out of the Army, but a lot of people threw in their two cents. On my own, I thought through my options and then made my own decision. I can tell you from my 94-year-old vantage point, I would not have changed anything for the wonderful family I have, the life I have lived, and where I am today. Not a thing!

About a week or so after starting work, an event occurred which shook up many of my co-workers. I was told to hand-carry a view-graph to corporate headquarters at 195 Broadway in New York City, taking the Hudson Tubes from Jersey City to New York. I made the delivery, and returned back to find the entire department overly joyed to see me. What I soon was told, there was a huge tragedy that occurred in the vicinity of my travels that day. It was somewhere in Newark Bay, and you probably can Google it to get the details. Essentially, a commuter train from South Jersey was carrying many passengers to their jobs in New York City. The train bridge over the bay had been opened to allow a large ship to pass through the bay, and

for whatever reason, it wasn't lowered or properly closed. As the train crossed the bridge, the first several cars plunged into the cold water. Several were left dangling, and the others remained on the trestle. Photographs in the next day's newspapers showed the dangling few cars, submerged ones, and those still on the tracks. I believe 63 people perished from that accident, including George Snuffy Sternweiss, a retired New York Yankee second baseman.

In later years, I used to tell the story to my communications classes, when I gave them an example of the role fate plays in one's life. Snuffy had gotten on the train near his Shore home, and I believe, instead of sitting in one of the last cars, he walked through several cars to get to his friends playing cards. Instead of surviving that tragic accident by being in one of the last cars, he was among the drowned passengers in the car that plunged into Newark Bay. What made me remember this story was the recent bridge wreck in Port Baltimore. That's the area we used to drive past in Dundalk, Maryland, going and returning from North Carolina. It was also just across the road from Fort Holabird, where I went to CIC school. Small world!

After I had worked for a while at Kearny, a co-worker said to me, "There's a girl you have to meet. I think you will like her." I met Josephine (Jo). She seemed very nice, and I asked her out. We went to a restaurant in Lyndhurst, her home town. We were both a little nervous, but the ice was broken when we were eating our shrimp cocktail appetizer. One of her four huge shrimp fell out of the bowl onto the plate under it. She was embarrassed and tried to ignore it. I said, "What would you do if this happened at your home?" She smiled and said, "I'd pick it up and put it back in the bowl." I said, "Let's make believe we're eating this meal at your house." She picked it up, put it back with the other three huge shrimp, and the meal continued with both of us completely relaxed.

After that dinner, she invited me to a large party at her friends in Paramus, New Jersey. The husband of the hostess, a football coach, and I hit it off very well. And that couple were very good friends of ours until they passed away in the last decade. One fine memory was

a summer visit at Long Beach Island, where they were renting. The families all caught tons of crabs fishing. Joe dumped them into his outdoor shower, and washed them all off en masse. We stood around a wooden table pigging out on those tasty crabs.

Jo and I continued dating, going to New York to see plays, sometimes going with friends of hers. In addition to seeing plays, we enjoyed attending musicals. Once years later, we got great seats, second row center aisle, and sat behind Mia Farrow's mother, Maureen O'Sullivan. All I remember, the play was called, "A Severed Head," a British comedy. I love British humor, and I was the only person in the theater laughing. Jo kept poking me to quiet down. She probably was right because the show was cancelled after that night.

We went on a double date with her girlfriend and Rollie Massimino, the later famous Villanova basketball coach. We drove down to the Shore with the top down on his big convertible. He was the only famous person to be in our wedding party.

Jo and I soon became engaged, and then married a few months later in November 1957. We went to Ft. Lauderdale on our honeymoon, but switched hotels after the first night because it was not what Jo had arranged. The second place was much better, and her girlfriend, who had married the previous week, was still there with her husband. A humorous incident occurred during that ensuing week, when we were out to dinner with our friends. There was a huge swimming pool, and below a cozy restaurant. We went to restaurant, and had seats right in front of a huge window looking out into the bottom of the pool above. During our time there, a woman who obviously had had too much to drink, dove to the bottom and began removing her bathing suit. She would go up and back down again, with fewer clothes each time. The other husband kept looking at me and the picture window, as we tried to make eye contact with our wives. It was a funny, funny scene that I will never forget.

I remember being surprised and happy when Jo thought she was pregnant with Gregg. With each of the next pregnancies, we had the same elation, except that after we lost baby Elizabeth to a congenital

heart condition, a tumor, we were very wary because we knew bad things could happen.

Back to Gregg. Jo was still working at Western Electric, Kearny, as secretary to the Department Chief of Public Relations. He lived in Chatham, New Jersey, and had invited us for lunch at his beautiful home when we became engaged. He also helped us purchase champagne at his friend's liquor store in Millburn, New Jersey, for the bridal party. We bought an entire case of champagne at a reduced price.

While Jo was expecting, I was appointed to become a director of the WeKearny Club, a vast company organization providing myriad employee services such as entertainment, etc. As a director, I would be specifically in charge of one aspect of their work: Noonday entertainment. My regular job was as a staff writer for the Kearnygram, Kearny's employee monthly newspaper. The director job was a non-paid, volunteer assignment, which took up a lot of my spare time, but I was put on that job by my Assistant Manager, "For development purposes." Kearny had about 20,000 employees, and I was responsible for providing lunchtime entertainment for all three shifts. The Kearny tract was like a small city because it contained stores, bowling alleys, Credit Union, dance floors, etc., so that employees could select from various forms of activity. At Christmas, they featured a Santa Claus and two helpers, attractive women in elf costumes, who were selected by members of the WeKearny Club, to give gifts to the families of the employees. Jo was selected to be one of the two women in 1957. I took a few of my nephews so that Santa Claus could give them some gifts.

Five days a week, I scheduled a band, a singing group, individual singers, musicians, specialty acts, or any other single or small group of performers to entertain the employees during their lunch hour. Although I was not happy for the extra work, it turned out to be a good deal for Jo. It so happened that she got nauseous every day from her pregnancy, and that job provided a means to help her out. I was required to meet the performers and sign them in at the front gate. After the lunch hour, I also had to feed them. Of course, the

meals were voucherable, and the only place that was open after lunch was a special dining room. Executives and special-occasion lunches were held in that area. A hostess was in charge of that private dining room; employees ate in one of the six cafeterias located throughout the several-acre tract. She oversaw all functions in that large room. The favorite item on that menu was shrimp cocktail, a cheese platter, and a filet mignon. My reward for my efforts was to eat that delicious meal with my guests. At that hour, we usually were the only people in the dining room. Because I knew Jo was suffering her nausea after eating her own lunch, I would wrap several pieces of cheese and sal-tine crackers in a napkin, put them in my sports jacket pocket, and after the meal, escort the visitors to the main gate for their departure. Jo's office area was just a few feet from the main gate, and I would stop with my "goodies," which were always welcomed with a smile by nauseous Jo. I was always well-received, but never lingered because her boss always eyed me carefully. It seems that the cheese and crack-ers always made Jo feel better.

In those early Kearny days, Charlie Kiamie squeezed me into his carpool for a few months until I became familiar with the highways, and parking rules and strategies. When I began driving myself, I tried to make up for it by driving his daughters Lynn and Karen, who were working there, to their jobs. Eventually, we moved to Lyndhurst in 1958, when Gregg was on the way, and I advertised for carpool riders to Kearny. Five women signed up, and five days a week I drove them to and from Western Electric, Kearny. The \$2 per week apiece paid for my gas and gave me a few extra dollars. This was quite a learning experience because on the way home, as each passenger was dropped off, the other women would talk about her. When there was only one left, I would often laugh and say, "You're out of luck because I don't gossip." And she would laugh and laugh because neither did she. This early carpool experience was my only negative one, and I went on to ride with my friend Ron Zuersher in North Carolina, and my friends Irene and her sister Mary when I returned to Kearny. They were all great pas-sengers, and our conversations were a combination of fun and helpful.

Gregg was born December 1, 1958, and we were living in a private home on the second floor in Lyndhurst. We had several scary experiences with him in those few years that we lived in Lyndhurst. One morning, we were in bed talking, when we heard a loud bang and thud from Gregg's room, and within seconds he came racing into our room and leaped onto the bed. He could walk, but was still a toddler and couldn't talk yet. We were shocked, but I carried him back to his room, put him into the crib again and moved away. I must have asked him to show us how he got out because he proceeded to throw himself against the gate on the crib, pull himself up and in one motion threw his leg over the side and let himself down with a final jump. He then looked up at us with this huge grin, happy with his extraordinary accomplishment. That was the end of him being relegated to playing alone in his crib. He must have been a little over a year because he was walking well and running.

The other event was sometime after that because he walked into the kitchen from the living room, and we heard a horrible scream and went running into the kitchen. There he was with his all-metal highchair leaning against him because he had reached up and put his hands in the mechanism that controlled the tray he ate from. He must have been investigating the mechanism that pulls at the metal tray, which collapsed into a smaller piece of equipment. His two hands were stuck, and I was sure they were crushed if not severed. I instantly lifted the tray itself, which immediately unlocked his clamped hands, releasing them, and put his hands under lukewarm water. Because he was so young, his hands were soft and supple, and nothing was broken or crushed, just compressed severely. The warm water brought back feeling, and when he smiled at us, I knew he would be OK. Afterwards I thought how lucky we were that there was no permanent damage.

Another memory of living in Lyndhurst, when Gregg was about 1-1/2 years old, I attended a supervisory course in Princeton, New Jersey. When I came home, Jo and Gregg were at my in-laws. As I came in their front door, my mother-in-law said to Gregg, "There's

your Daddy!” He raced across the room and physically threw himself into the air at me. I caught him, and he hugged and squeezed me, with the most beautiful welcoming sigh of contentment that made me feel I had been really missed.

In early 1960, we bought our first home for \$12,000. It was on Saville Row in Fanwood, New Jersey. Yesterday, April 25, 2025, I read a note in the weekly newspaper that one of those similar houses as mine on that street just sold for \$780,000. Sixty-four years later, that house was worth \$768,000 more than the original purchase! Our other three children were born there by the middle of 1964.

When Chris was born in 1961, we were thrilled that we would have another addition to our growing family. Friends had cautioned us to look for sibling jealousy, but when Chris was born, Gregg never showed any jealousy of his younger brother. He immediately knew he had to protect him, and he always did. I think he felt the same way I did with my younger brothers Ed and Bob. I was proud of them, and always looked out for them. He played with Chris, and always tried to teach him. I don’t think there was ever any competition between them. I always felt comfortable that Gregg would always look out for his kid brother.

Chris would play in his playpen for hours, and entertain himself with his toys. When out of his playpen, he investigated everything. He was very curious. One day when he was getting into everything, I picked him up under his arms and his feet kept walking. I dubbed him “PM” – perpetual motion. I contended that if you picked him up, his feet kept walking because he wanted to keep exploring things. Chris was very sensitive, would be moved to tears easily, but if either Jo or I picked him up at that time, he would reward us by immediately stopping crying and smiling big time. He never held on to hurt feelings but would let them go quickly.

On Sundays, when Gregg was 5 and Chris was 2, and for several years after that, I would take the boys to a playground in Lyndhurst, where we usually had dinner with Jo’s family. That was because their Sunday dinner lasted for many hours, through many courses. After

the pasta and bread, I was full and so were the boys. They would get “antsy” because they were required to sit at the table, which was difficult for them at their age. It was also very difficult for me at my age because I wasn’t brought up to eat many courses at one sitting. Essie and Sitto put everything on the table all at once. You filled up your plate, and when everyone finished, you left the table. One day when it was getting noisy and tempers were getting frayed, I made a brilliant, life-saving move: I suggested that I take the boys out for fresh air, so that the family could enjoy the remaining courses. I took them to a park and school, where we usually hiked around and everybody was happy. We came back in a few hours for dessert.

Where did the family expression, “a bug, a bug” come from? Chris was about 1-1/2 years old, and one day was yelling in a high-pitched voice. When I raced into the room, where he was sitting in his playpen, he had a huge smile on his face, and he was pointing to a bug crawling away from him. He had such a proud look on his face, and kept repeating the words, smiling because he had discovered it. He wanted the whole world to know. I personally hate all bugs except ladybugs, lightning bugs, and grasshoppers. The ones I hate most are mosquitoes and thousand-leggers. I always kill them following the premise that fewer will bite me in the future. When I was a kid, I used to catch lightning bugs and put them in a bottle, with holes in the top lid from nails, and walk around in the dark with my “crazy” flashlight. I do allow spiders to live near doors because when I was young my father would say, “Don’t kill those spiders because they will trap all the other insects that come into your house.” It’s true. And my side-door spiders keep mosquitoes from sneaking into the house.

I have seen photos of myself at various ages of my life. And several times, I see a picture of Chris, and I am astounded when it reminds me of how I looked at a younger age. He is a bigger and better version of myself.

One major characteristic that Chris must have gotten from me is not tolerating gristle and fat in cuts of meat. I used to tell him, when he was carefully “sanitizing” a piece of meat, “Son, I already

did it.” He would point to a small piece of gristle and say, “You missed some, Dad.”

When the boys got older, and we were still living in Fanwood, and then later, Scotch Plains, I took them to a local playground, where I pitched and the boys took batting practice and shagging fly balls. I was so proud of Chris because whatever sport we practiced, he kept up with his older brother and father, which made each excursion enjoyable for all of us. I can’t recall one time either of them complained about our workouts. They were always eager and never seemed to tire out.

After a few years at Kearny, I was lured to New York City to work on Project Mercury, America’s first attempted man-in-space mission. Rod, the head of the Western Electric Project Mercury, assigned me of the three staff writers to be the note-taker at the monthly Project Mercury meetings at 220 Church Street in New York City. It was a big deal and very stressful for me because the attendees discussed all the very technical aspects of the worldwide tracking system. Some of the other companies attending besides Western Electric and NASA were Stromberg Carlson, IBM, Bell Labs, Burns & Roe, and a few others. When I say stressful, I had to take notes and publish a report to all the attendees so they could address and solve any problem that cropped up in this 18-site network. To me, they were often speaking another language because this English major had to learn about telemetry, ablative shields, and other words I had never heard before.

I was saved because of an engineer named Larry, who attended the meetings and was a very nice guy. I tried to write down every word being said to help me draft a report. I would then grab the elevator to the next floor where he worked, and he always gave me top priority. He would patiently correct my many errors, explain what was being discussed, and help me to redraft it in a clearer format. Without his expertise and complete support, I would have failed big time! Although the foundational work was mine, an editor is always crucial to a fine product. Any chance that I ever could, I let Rod know of the tremendous support I received from Larry.

Three stories I remember about those monthly meetings. One day after several hours of an intensive meeting, I was thrilled when Rod declared a 10-minute break because I really needed to use the rest room. I led the exodus through one of the many doors in the conference room. Unfortunately, because it was a different door than I usually used, I bolted into – and out of – the ladies' room. Very red-faced and closely observed by about 10,000,000 laughing co-workers. I didn't live that one down for a very long time.

The second story was when the California-based Stromberg Carlson representative commented to Rod about having to make that long trip to New York every month, offering to discuss the many complicated issues by phone instead. Rod, a great guy, always chewed gum, and when he got upset, he would smile. When I saw his huge smile, I thought, "Uh oh." And then he said to the representative, "I don't know about the rest of you, but I do better when I communicate belly to belly than ear to ear." The room cracked up in laughter, and that ended the discussion. I left that out of the notes in the minutes.

Another story had to do with the PR aspects of Project Mercury. NASA wanted people to know about this huge, important undertaking so they encouraged Rod to accept invitations to speak throughout New York City at Rotary Clubs and the like. I was the keeper of his carousel slide tray, making sure that the latest slides, showing the construction at each site, found their way into the appropriate slot in that tray. It was important because that slide tray was his notes for all the talks he gave. They served as a current reminder of all the information he already had in that very intelligent, technical brain. He was a director at Bell Labs in his other life.

My good fortune was that on all of his many luncheon talks in very nice restaurants in New York City, he would take me, The Carousel Man, to handle the slide projector. That meant that I ate very well...often very quickly...because I had to set up everything so that we were ready once he walked up to the podium after he ate. One day, in the middle of his talk, the projector bulb blew, and in that semi-darkened room, I could clearly see EVERY head in the

room turn and look at me. Cool Rod just continued to talk about other aspects of Project Mercury, the various problems that had to be resolved, while I desperately sought a replacement bulb. I honestly don't recall where or how I got one, but it took a very long time. I learned my lesson and never went to another luncheon without a spare bulb in my pocket. Of course, it never happened again. And class guy that he was, Rod never said a word about it, knowing I had learned my lesson.

Years later, whenever teaching a public speaking class, I would tell that story and remind my students that you have complete responsibility whenever you go out and give a talk. Whatever happens, you need a backup plan, so that your audience is never let down. It reminds me of an incident of how I improvised to solve an unexpected problem. At Project Mercury, we had prepared a Family Night for visitors and families to come to our New York City building with snacks along the way. I was assigned to one of the displays which featured a slide show with voice-over depicting the 18 Mercury tracking sites around the world. My job was to welcome the guests coming into my area, and point to the display. It was an automatic exhibit, and the voice was synchronized to explain each photo as it changed on the screen. A vice president and his family of five approached, and after greeting them I turned on the display. Unfortunately, a glitch happened, and there was no voice, only picture. They looked at me for a solution, so I just proceeded to become the narrator as each site came onto the screen. I was familiar with all the sites, having written about them so often that I could do it, but I had to talk very fast because each site photo was on the screen for only a few seconds. When I was done, the vice president came over and shook my hand. More importantly, the next day he told my boss what I had done, and it received more attention than it had deserved. The point is that my backup plan had been to become a subject-matter expert on the topic so I could handle whatever might occur.

Those every-so-often luncheons replaced my daily bologna on roll with mustard that I picked up every day around the corner from

my office. Because I was brought up never to waste food, that bologna sandwich, which I really loved, would be my mid-p.m. snack that I can still taste – even with my very diminished taste buds in my later years. Another side benefit of being the note-taker and slide-projector operator was that I was the only one of the three writers promoted a few years later. It's because it gave me exposure to upper management. Also, I made it a point to say yes to all opportunities that came my way even though they meant more work. This helped me grow in knowledge about whatever I was involved in. In the corporate world, it also often was the difference between survival and dismissal. In one group I was one of 12 section chiefs. As the company was cutting its supervisory workforce, we would meet with the boss every so often, and he would tell us that someone was leaving the group, and we needed to cover his beat. While everyone else was ducking their heads, I raised my hand and said, "I'll take it." In three months, everyone had left but me, and I had all of their jobs and had learned 11 new disciplines. When the organization was finally disbanded, I was saved by being attached to an existing department because they didn't want to lose me, they said.

Turning now back to my family, after happily enjoying our growing active sons we were jolted by the trauma of losing baby Elizabeth in 1963. We were not at all comfortable bringing her home from the hospital, which was a horrific experience. She had turned bluish a few times when she was home, and it was scary. The doctors assured us it would be OK, so we brought her to Saville Row and watched her like a hawk. She was having breathing problems one night, and we called the doctor and put the telephone on her chest. He told us to call an ambulance and take her to Overlook Hospital. Jo rode in the ambulance, and I followed in the car, going through all the lights the ambulance did because I had never been to Overlook Hospital before. When I got to the hospital, Elizabeth was in an isolette to help her breathing. Two flaps were open so I couldn't understand how she could be getting air, so I asked a nurse if those flaps should be closed. She closed them, and then told Jo and me to leave the

room because we were not supposed to be in there, and then watched from outside the room until the doctor told us to go home, and he would keep us advised. We went home, and at 6:00 or 7:00 a.m., the phone rang, and we looked at each other with trepidation. The doctor told us she had passed away.

We were devastated, and later Jo lost a close friendship over this. Days later, a childhood friend from Lyndhurst and her very nice husband came over to comfort us. She was a nurse, and when I told her about the isolette being open (I first said it probably had nothing to do with her passing) and the nurse throwing us out, Jo's friend – being insensitive to our feelings – said very sharply, "She was right, You shouldn't have been there." After some angry words back and forth, she stood up and said to her husband, "We should leave." And I said, "Yes, you probably should." That was it. And I never heard from them again. I have no idea if Jo and she ever spoke again, but I didn't know that baby Elizabeth was exhumed from Linden Cemetery and reburied in Lyndhurst until I visited Jo's gravesite a few years ago and saw her name etched there. I'm so glad she was moved to be among family. In a previous book, I touched on the brief life of Elizabeth and what a blow it was to our family. I don't know the effect her death had upon the psyches of each member of my family. Only they would know about that blow to their early lives. Jo and I tried to keep the boys away from that hurt, trying to restrict it to ourselves.

When Jo was pregnant with Meg, we had our hearts in our throat because the previous year we had the roller coaster ride of emotions with the birth and death of Elizabeth. When Meg entered the scene the next year, our happiness was short-lived because she had become jaundiced and had to have a life-saving complete blood transfer. We thought tragedy was happening again, and Jo was overwhelmed by it. It happened on a weekend, and only interns were available to conduct the tricky procedure. (The procedure had only been developed a few years before Meg was born.) To make matters worse, shortly after that scary event, her digestive system went crazy, and she was unable to retain any kind of solid food or liquid. She went through

countless diapers during an era when there were only cloth diapers, so our washing machine and dryer were working nonstop. In fact, one night, the washing machine stopped working, and Mr. Non-Tekkie repaired it because we needed it so badly. I think it was a lot of trial and error until it worked again. I was one happy repairman! I knew I wouldn't stop until I fixed it.

I remember the day Meg started getting better. I was spoon-feeding her Hi-C Grape Juice, and she swallowed it instead of spitting it out. I cried as I kept spooning it into her mouth and soon that awful sickly look on her face was gone. I bought several cans of that Hi-C Grape, and she kept drinking it. It was a miracle, and we were so happy.

Her first year or so was tough because her tummy bothered her a lot even after the Hi-C victory. I usually carried her mostly at night because Jo was exhausted carrying her during the day while I was at work. Her periodic screams broke my heart because I wasn't being successful in calming her down. Thankfully, by 2 years old, her stomach got better, and then she went through a serene period where she was pain-free, sweet, and reasonably happy. My favorite memory of her was sitting in a small basket in Hasbrouck Heights at her Aunt and Uncle Manisera's house, wearing a pretty dress and bonnet, looking like the most beautiful baby I ever saw. Sometimes her grandparents from Lyndhurst would be over for a cookout in our backyard. Usually, though, we would be in Lyndhurst on Sunday. On holidays, we raced up and down the Parkway to visit our Cranford and Lyndhurst families. During the week, because I was working in New York City, I would be away from morning until evening. One memory of those lengthy meals in Lyndhurst was watching how Meg devoured artichokes. When I would return from the local park with the boys, she would be buried in those huge artichokes. For whatever dumb reason, I thought they wouldn't taste good until about the age of 70, when I had my first artichoke in a restaurant in Kenilworth, and fell in love with it. I then remembered how much Meg loved it, and was sorry that I hadn't tried it 40 years earlier.

At this point in our lives, our family was complete. Jo was at home with the children, a very full-time job, while I was in New York at Western Electric and then refereeing basketball game for extra money in the Iron Bound section of Newark. I was officiating games at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 and 4:00 on Sundays for 12-year-olds, and I was offered \$7.50 to ref with somebody else or \$10 if I did the game myself. I did it myself. Meg spent most of her time with Jo and the relatives – she and I didn't get too much time together at that point in her life. Gregg and Chris welcomed her happily to the family, and from my point of view they seemed to take care of her. Another thing that made it difficult to spend time with her was the fact that in 1968 I was promoted to head up the Western Electric Speakers Bureau for the country. In the 23 months that I ran that operation, I learned a lot about the company, its many locations, and improved my skills in public speaking. Part of the assignment consisted of conducting a series of workshops throughout the country. I spent three days in motels each week with 7 local employees, working on their speaking skills. It prepared me to teach in colleges 20-some years later. I ate very well, and got to taste many dishes from around the country. To give you an idea of the places where I conducted these workshops, here are many of them: Atlanta, San Francisco, Omaha, Lincoln, Cleveland, Dallas, Orlando, Miami, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Denver, Chicago, Boston, Allentown, Phoenix, Towson, and others I've forgotten. It qualified me for further promotions within Western Electric; it enabled me to provide nice homes for my family to live in, and I got to meet many, many wonderful people. Those Speaker Bureaus Workshops were productive and always successful. In fact, many attendees or their superiors wrote letters praising the training they had received, sending them to my superiors in New York City. When I was interviewed for a promotion to Greensboro, North Carolina, the director, having read many of the letters furnished by my boss, said to me, "My God, did you pay people to write all those letters?" Stupidly, I got angry and took offense at his implication. When I didn't hear from North Carolina for a month after the interview,

I felt I had blown the interview with my reaction. But then a week later, I was told I got the promotion. So apparently my natural reaction wasn't held me against me, and the director, Bob, and I became close friends when I moved to North Carolina.

Upon reflection, the months between 1968 and 1970, as head of the Western Electric Speakers Bureau, helped me enormously to grow in confidence and knowledge. Later, when I retired at 59 after 33 years at Western Electric, I was able to effectively teach at Kean University, Union County College, and Fairleigh Dickinson University for another 33 years. Of course, all my experiences growing up also helped to prepare me for everything that followed, although I didn't realize it as they were happening.

In 1970, I was promoted to Western Electric's Safeguard Project in Greensboro, North Carolina. The good part of the move for my kids was it widened their horizons from strictly family visits in New Jersey and introduced them to a whole new world down South. It influenced each of them in different ways – some good, some not so good. But definitely different. In the long run, it opened their minds to the reality of other cultures, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc., and helped them to grow into exceptional persons. For Jo, it gave her a comfortable house that she turned into a beautiful home she was very proud of. She attended many important events that pleased her like college football games, basketball games, appearing on TV, attending a ball and having overnights at the Governor's mansion. She worked part time at a local school, and even had her photograph in the Greensboro newspaper in that capacity. As for me, I had a very challenging job, traveled a little, watched my children adjust to their new home and state, got to resume my friendship with old Army buddy Bob Scott, now North Carolina's governor, and learned how to play tennis, which helped me stay in good shape for years.

After 3 busy, exciting years in Greensboro, Safeguard ended abruptly, when Congress cut the funding and 2,000 Western Electric employees had to find jobs. I heard that the Assistant Manager of

Public Relations in Kearny, New Jersey, was retiring, and asked my boss to put me in for that job. A week later, he notified me that the PR Assistant Manager was not going to be replaced, that the Personnel Manager was going to absorb his job and do both of them. Two weeks later, I was called in and told I had been placed in Kearny. I said, "I thought he was not going to be replaced." My boss answered, "He's not, but the Personnel Manager who had to do both jobs decided he would retire." So I was given both jobs.

Eventually after a few years at Kearny, another job – managing all the Kearny cafeterias – was added to my responsibilities, giving me 120 employees. While it was very hard work, I enjoyed it – and ate very well.

In 1983, after I had been 10 years back at Kearny, the plant, with probably 5,000 employees, was closing. I was happy, though, because in this negative situation, I was given the job of placing people elsewhere and saving their careers. I was put in charge of the Outplace Center to find jobs for thousands of employees in other Bell System offices or plants. To do so meant I had to often argue with the manufacturing or engineering directors, both two levels above me. Each time I found a job for an employee they were not inclined to release him/her because they were still required to get the product out that we were making at Kearny. Each case was debated before our General Manager – the final authority. I never lost one case because the General Manager always supported getting our employees placed in career-saving jobs.

In my next assignment, Tom Thomsen, the President of AT&T Technologies, hired me as a member of his PR staff. Kearny was still in the process of closing when I was transferred to that assignment in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey. For the first couple of years, I worked in supporting the field locations throughout the country that reported to Tom, and the last couple of years, I was assigned to be his personal PR assistant when he was named President of the Telephone Pioneers of America for the entire company in addition to his regular manufacturing leadership role. The Pioneers

was a company-sponsored organization made up of Bell System employees or retirees focused on good works for the communities where they worked or lived. In that final capacity, I helped prepare several of his speeches, answered some of his correspondence, coordinated his college relations efforts, especially with University of Nebraska and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I traveled with him on the corporate jet to those universities, and handled the liaison with their staff, including with the Presidents of both schools. One of our single greatest accomplishments was coordinating a reception after a Nebraska football game at the Meadowlands in New Jersey involving top business leaders and political officials from New Jersey and Washington, D.C., as well as host of other dignitaries. It took several months of very hard work to coordinate all these exciting activities, and I loved that exciting challenge.

There were many highlights from those years closing out my career working for Tom Thomsen. On one occasion, he asked me to substitute for him and fly to Nova Scotia, where he was scheduled to give a speech to a large group of Telephone Pioneers. As President of that group for two years, he went to many functions throughout the country, and I usually accompanied him. To get to Nova Scotia, I had to take several different flights, the last one being a puddle-hopper, which had 10 passengers, was bumpy as could be, and it seemed to make 10 billion stops. When we finally got there, a driver picked me up at the airport, and on the way to our meeting passed several absolutely beautiful lakes. I asked him to stop at one so I could get out and smell the beautiful, clean breeze and take in that wonderful scene of the sprawling lake. They were all crystal clear, not a ripple. When I eventually got to the affair, the guests were already eating. I pulled up a chair, wolfed down my lunch, met some VIPs afterwards, gave a 15-minute talk, and returned to the airport, and eventually home.

When Tom announced his retirement in December 1990, the next day I announced mine. I was 59-1/2 years old, and accepted an early retirement package, which added 5 years to my age and service

to increase my pension. Friends tried to talk me into continuing work for one of two directors who I respected a lot, but I said, "I had the best job in the world. I want to be like Ted Williams. He hit a home run, crossed home plate, and retired at the top of his game." Any job I would do would pale next to the enjoyment and autonomy I had working for Tom.

All of the above prepared me to teach others at three colleges for another 33 years. What I only now realize is that everything that happened were building blocks for the next phase of my life. Of course, I had no idea as each experience occurred. In looking back at my Western Electric/AT&T career, I have concluded the following: Although I had the most authority and power as an Assistant Manager at Greensboro and Kearny, I feel that my previous 23 months as Speakers Bureau Department Chief in New York City was the time I was most effective, touring the country and teaching employees how to speak publicly. I had the opportunity to travel to many states, visit a lot of company locations, and influence numerous people. I was a novice when I was first promoted, but worked hard and learned quickly. I was very confident in my ability, and dealt with people at every level of authority, always respecting my superiors, but never being intimidated or overwhelmed by them. I comfortably but respectfully disagreed with my superiors if I believed in my convictions, and made only a few mistakes among the multitude of issues I dealt with. The growth I experienced at that time stood me in good stead for the rest of my career. I admitted it if I was wrong, but fought hard for what I believed was fair and right. In many cases, I was able to change the minds of several high-level officers on issues they had incorrectly supported. Almost all of them respected where I was coming from, and threw their support behind me. The best advice I would give on not only work issues but all issues in life would be: Be true to yourself, but always be respectful and discreet about it.

Other folks I'll never forget
Bob Scott

Bob was a CIC colleague I met on the ship to Yokohama in 1953. Or if it was after I arrived at the CIC Headquarters in the Kempei Tai (secret police) building in Tokyo. I don't remember if he was one of the bridge players on ship, my recollection is fuzzy. What I do remember is that he had a warmth, a smile, and a sense of humor that made you instantly like him. Perhaps that's why he was elected governor of North Carolina some years later. His family was very involved in politics, his father having served as governor, and while we were in Japan, was elected a U.S. Senator. You'd never know it because he was one down-to-earth young man. His mother was also extremely popular, as I would later learn in the 1970s when I was transferred to Western Electric's Safeguard Project in Greensboro, North Carolina.

However, while we were still in Japan, Bob often talked about his family, his wife Jessie, and the family they had begun. A few months before his enlistment was up, Bob was sent home to be at his father's swearing-in ceremony as a U.S. Senator. Interestingly, he tried to turn down that early transfer because he never sought special privileges, but when the Army cuts orders, you follow them.

In 1970, when I was transferred to North Carolina, I was unaware that Bob had been elected governor but I soon found out. It wasn't until Western Electric celebrated the opening of its new, gigantic Guilford Center, and we invited the elite throughout the state, that I knew that he was in that top position. In fact, we met in a most unusual way.

As Public Relations Manager, I was hosting the media in a roped-off portion of the main cafeteria, while the dignitaries were lunching in the main ballroom. I had mentioned to my boss, Mac, how I knew the Governor in Japan, and

he so informed the Governor's aide as they had lunch in the ballroom. My back was to that entrance door when all of a sudden a hush came over the noisy cafeteria. I turned to see a slightly older Bob Scott, cigar in mouth, escorted by a uniformed state trooper heading my way. My awe-stricken secretary was standing next to me, trying to understand what was happening. Bob grabbed me in a bear hug, lifted me off the ground, and chastised me for not letting me know I was in his state. It was an unforgettable moment, as cheers rose from the large body of employees in the cafeteria who had witnessed the scene. We chatted for a few minutes, he wrote down my home phone number, promising to call and have my family visit him in Raleigh, and then rushed back to the main event. That was the beginning of several social encounters with Governor Scott during the three years I lived in North Carolina.

A few days later, I was unsuccessfully trying to cultivate the red soil behind my house in order to plant a few tomatoes, when the backdoor flew open, and Jo yelled, "Governor Scott is on the phone." The call proved to be the beginning of several years of visits to the Governor's mansion, a few athletic events, and some reciprocal visits to top-notch restaurants.

He scheduled the first visit during a political tug-of-war that required most of his presence. We were invited to a North Carolina State football game, and met at the appointed time. Unfortunately, it came at a sensitive political time, so Governor Scott was unable to attend the game. Instead, he sent my family and me to the game in his personal limousine chauffeured by a uniformed state trooper. My three children were awed by the fact that troopers along the route to the stadium came to attention and saluted us, assuming the Governor was in the car. At the game, snack vendors made available a large choice of goodies, which pleased my youngsters. When I tried to pay for them, they shook their heads and

pointed across the way, where the Chancellor was standing waving at us. After the game, we returned to the mansion, where Governor Scott awaited us. He toured us through the mansion, and when we entered the dining area, my children got shook up when he calmly explained that all the help staff were prisoners, incarcerated for the crime of murder. He explained that they were the most trustworthy of the inmates as opposed to those who had committed fraud, embezzlement, and such, who could not be trusted.

The next invitation was to a North Carolina State basketball game. We were ushered into the seats next to Governor Scott, and I didn't know the game was being televised until the next day. A neighbor in Greensboro rang my doorbell, explained his shock at seeing me with the Governor on TV, and then asked if he could use my name in a letter to curry a favor from the Governor about a regulation that was affecting his business. I strongly turned down his request because I would be very uncomfortable using a relationship with a friend in that manner.

Back to the basketball game, Governor Scott suggested Jo and I attend a celebration after the game for the North Carolina State basketball team. Jo insisted she did not have a proper dress, so off we went in Governor Scott's limousine, and she purchased the proper attire. That's when I learned a lot about how personal clout works. Bob would introduce us to a group of attendees, which immediately grew in size until almost everyone attending was surrounding us. After a few minutes, he would wander off to chat with someone else. Within minutes the crowd around us dispersed and formed around the person the Governor was talking to, leaving Jo and me completely alone. After a bit, he would notice our situation and move back to us, bringing a crowd with him. The interest of the guests was to be part of Governor Scott's aura; where he went, they went.

I learned more about social behavior when we began receiving dinner invitations from corporate leaders we hardly knew, who fussed over us and spent most of the occasion talking about Governor Scott and how we got to know him.

One memorable evening, I recall sitting with Bob in a den-type room, chomping down hundreds of pistachio nuts as we discussed parenting, school, and the upbringing of our children. Later that evening, or it may have been during another visit, he suggested we raid the kitchen. Those cheese sandwiches and ice-cold milk hit the spot. I believe that our 7-year-old daughter Meg was with us on that sleepover occasion. By the way, my mother, upon hearing the story, sent Governor Scott a 10-lb bag of colossal pistachio nuts from New York City.

Prior to being transferred up to Kearny Works, one of the top officers at our location abruptly told me to get my jacket and come with him. We went to the largest country club in Greensboro to have lunch with some of this officer's cronies and a few journalists and editors. It didn't take me long to realize their collective purpose was to obtain some dirt about their governor. Eventually, after bombarding me with many questions, they realized there was nothing to be said about that fine man, and the luncheon ended abruptly. I returned to our office in the company of a not-very-happy camper. Both Governor Scott and Jessie have passed away, and I miss that very good friend.

David Younger

If this were a movie, David Younger would have the leading male role. He was tall, handsome, mustached, and slender. I have not met anyone as intelligent as he was. I know I had to be sure of my facts each time I would meet with him. He was a director of Defense Projects at 220 Church Street in New York City, and responsible for Western Electric's

contracts with the U.S. government. He was in charge of answering Request For Quotations (RFQs) for the many communications networks contracts our company would bid on. My job was to work with his technical people to package the written words into a published document that his people would deliver to Washington, D.C. for consideration. Ours was a highly pressured job because we had to deliver the document no later than the published date and time on the RFQs. My team of writers, illustrators, typists would always be “under the gun” because of last-minute changes. If we needed to work until 2:00 a.m., we would, and we did. I recall delivering a copy of a completed proposal to his Short Hills home late at night. He was in his bathrobe when he answered the door.

Because of his responsibility, David Younger traveled across the globe, visiting governments in many countries. The in-depth research required to support those efforts kept us extremely busy, and we learned a lot about this vast world. He made sure all the groups I needed help from within our company would always give my team top priority in getting the job done. Later, he saved my job when the company was downsizing its operation. He personally made sure that I was not swept up in the downsizing.

A year or so later, he telephoned me when I was in a new position and told me that he had decided to retire. I was surprised but I asked him whether I could take him to lunch. He said, “No, but thank you. I just wanted you to know I was leaving.” Several years later, I read that he had passed away. He truly was a remarkable person!

Bob Bright

Bob was a General Manager for Western Electric on Maiden Lane in New York City, and was instrumental in

picking me up from Defense Projects when that work was winding down. For several years, I served as his writer, editor, listener and aide-de-camp. I learned much about the company, strategy, communications during my time working for him in the mid-1960s. He often spoke about his son, who was in the service during the Vietnam conflict. And though I don't recall the details, he won an outstanding award for valor. His father was enormously proud of him.

At a pivotal point in 1968, I was being sought after by two different Western Electric divisions for a promotion. I asked Bob which he would recommend that I take, and he suggested the head of the company's Speakers Bureau. The choice was perfect because I did so and it was my best 23-month assignment I had during my 33 years with Western Electric.

Later when I was promoted to the Greensboro Safeguard Project, I ran into Bob several times after he was transferred from New York City to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to run the company's operation in that city. Bob Bright was an outstanding gentleman and mentor.

Malcolm MacDonald

I met "Mac" in my early days at Western Electric's Kearny Plant. He was highly principled, soft-spoken, and a gentleman worth listening to. He was married to Jo's first cousin Christine, also an exemplary individual. Mac was a first level supervisor in 1956, and rose to a division manager before his too-early death. In 1970, he served as my boss when I went to Greensboro on the Safeguard Project.

Those of us who knew Mac greatly admired him. He worked very hard, and his wisdom was evident. During my 3 years in Greensboro, we socialized with the MacDonalds and their large family of intelligent, attractive, and

kind children, who absolutely reflected their parents' values. Mac and I stayed in shape by playing a lot of tennis, often just against one another. Jo remained close with the MacDonalds even after we returned from North Carolina in 1973. Without a doubt I became a better person under Mac's tutelage.

Cal Tribiano

Dr. Calvin Tribiano was the medical director at Kearny Works when I met him in the late 1970s. Several years later, he probably saved my life because I was under tremendous stress, both at work and at home. The pains in my left arm were severe, and he advised me to eliminate the cause or I would have negative consequences. I did so, and the pain went away.

We had a good relationship, which eventually translated to having lunch periodically at Ferraro's with a few others. He loved his broccoli rabe, which Ferraro's featured on the menu. He insisted no one else made it that well. Later we exchanged hosting lunches, always at that same restaurant. That continued long after we had both retired. We enjoyed lengthy conversations about the state of the world and our lives.

During this period, I was teaching at several colleges, and he was enjoying his retirement. He was devastated when he lost his wife of many years, Mabel. Although retired, he kept up with the latest medical technology by attending meetings of the AMA. He got older, but his mind never "retired." He loved his beautiful Spring Lake, New Jersey, vacation home. We had long discussions about it. I also especially enjoyed his stories when he lived abroad as a medical officer for a large pharmaceutical corporation. As with most of my colleagues of yesterday, I lost Cal some years ago.

Bill Zervoulis

One of my colleagues I lunched with at Ferraro's was Bill Zervoulis. Bill was a superb photographer at Kearny, and over the years became one of my closest friends. I often hired him to photograph family functions as my children were growing up. He became an outstanding tennis player as he grew older. We played many, many singles and doubles matches in several groups.

As a veteran of Kearny, he was invaluable in explaining to me the nuances of the gigantic Kearny Plant, which at one time had 25,000 employees. Bill was my liaison with the cafeteria, which reported to me, and made sure we would enjoy coffee and a buttered roll each morning before we started our busy day.

Late in his life, Bill remarried and moved South. He and his new bride Toni resided in Hilton Head, where he played tennis constantly in an older age group, and won several championships. Bill passed away in his '80s.

Ellis Vines

On my return to Kearny, I had the great fortune to meet and work with one of the most dedicated supervisors in the Western Electric Company. Ellis Vines headed up the Employment and Placement Department during the 1970s and was responsible for ensuring that all movement of personnel was in strict accordance with the union contract covering thousands of workers. Ellis knew every passage of the contract so we were assured that no "hanky panky" or favoritism could enter into the process. I found him to be a man of unflappable integrity. I often would conduct meetings of opposing managers, where one was trying to conduct a "shady" maneuver. Ellis would join the meeting, we would listen to

both sides of the argument, and then Ellis would cite the written clause from the contract that supported one side or the other. That would always be our decision, not necessarily pleasing both parties but always correct and fair. Our role was not to be liked but to be respected and to follow the rule of law...or actually, the contract. I might add that Ellis was very well liked and admired by almost all members of his very large department. Oh yes, we both slept very well at night. When we lost Ellis years later, I attended the wake and talked with his very likeable widow Cathy, who along with her sister Elise and their father had also worked for Western Electric. In fact, at one period while I was at Kearny, the sisters and I all rode the train to Kearny for several years and, since they got on in Westfield, they always saved me a seat.

John Bridges

Rocky is living in Florida as he approaches his 90th birthday. He, like some of us, has had several career ventures during his life. We worked together at Kearny for a number of years. Our ideas on most issues usually blended together effectively. After a career at Western Electric, I turned to teaching at several local colleges. Rocky also joined the field of higher education, but served in an administrative capacity. We ran into one another occasionally during that period. The next that I knew, he had relocated to Las Vegas as a Bell System employee, but he spent most of his 17 years there as a retiree.

Later on he moved to Florida, and currently has an apartment in his daughter's very large home. He is struggling with some health issues, but challenges them head-on. Like others, he's paying the price for the pounding his body took when he was a youngster at Lincoln High School in Jersey City and excelled on the football field as an All State fullback. We often chat on the phone, learning things about one another's

younger days that we didn't know about before. He is easy-going, smiles a lot, is fun to be with, and I consider him a good friend.

George Kelly

George was a co-worker, a friend, and one of the best tennis players I knew. With a culinary education from Cornell, he supervised the entire cafeteria "kingdom" when Kearny was feeding thousands of employees daily. He also had responsibility for most of the outlying locations as well as the second shift. George had a remarkable relationship with the large number of employees working for him. He was very comfortable with them as he moved with ease at the various locations.

In one of my last years at the plant, George and I won the doubles tennis championship, while George also won the singles trophy. Late in his career his duties were expanded to acquire some responsibility at the outplacement center helping many employees to find positions at other company locations as the plant was closing down. The last I knew about George, he was transferred to Western Electric's New Jersey Distributing House in Jersey City. I've tried to locate George for many years now and have not been successful in finding him.

Bill Donohue

Bill is a highly respected friend in his late '80s, working hard to get through some health issues. We periodically talk about yesterday, today, and hopefully look forward to tomorrow. I've known Bill and his attractive and intelligent wife Irene for over 50 years. We go back to my second tour at Kearny, 1973-1983.

Once in a while we had enjoyable tennis matches in Jersey City's Lincoln Park, where he usually prevailed. Years

later we played in a Senior Softball League against one another. For many years, we met with Frank Mertz and Bob Bozzomo for lunch. They were among the most fulfilling, rewarding get-togethers because we discussed every subject, large and small, that was affecting our lives. The banter was always even better than the delicious food we ate. As a result of the Covid pandemic and my ongoing concern about eating inside a restaurant, we stopped those luncheons. We both miss those face-to-face, in-depth discussions where for a few hours we could critique humankind's current course in this turbulent world.

Bill and Irene have a very large family, with the next generation appearing to possess their parents' values of fairness and equality of life.

We both retired from AT&T Technologies in 1990, Bill as a well-respected director. I believe he worked at Mount Saint Mary's School in Watchung, New Jersey, for a number of years handling their finances while I went into teaching. Bill is the kind of guy you would have wanted to marry your sister. He is honorable, trustworthy, smart, good sense of humor, and a valuable friend.

Frank Adamchak

Frank worked in Labor Relations at Kearny, and was one of the shrewdest persons I ever knew. He could solve any problem that had to do with getting good results from a difficult situation. He knew everyone, and his counsel was invaluable to me. He didn't hold a high position, but often functioned as the "chief smoother-outer" when encountering difficult situations. His solutions ranged from the workforce to my personal life.

For example, when in 1973 I returned from the Safeguard Project in North Carolina to become Human Resources

Manager at Kearny, I encountered an unpleasant situation. As I tried to enter the gate near my designated staff parking spot, I encountered a nasty security guard who was also haranguing a few other employees. I tried to explain to him that I had just shown my pass at the gate I just drove through. He became very angry, so I complied with his request but memorized his name. I asked Frank to request that the Chief of Security come to my office at his convenience. I soon met with Frank and the Chief of Security, and explained what had happened at the gate. The Head of Security visited the guard and then returned to my office and said to me, "I apologize because he didn't know who you were." I berated the Chief, telling him that was the whole point: It didn't matter who I was. I wanted our guards to treat everybody courteously regardless of their rank. He understood my point and I soon detected a changed demeanor on the part of that guard.

Another example. I told Frank that I wasn't comfortable with the idea that I was Chairman of the "Crime" Committee to settle infractions at our plant. With his advice, we changed the name to Rules Committee, which sent a better message to the workforce.

On the personal side of our relationship, after a long strike in 1974, I caught a bad case of my nemesis, poison ivy, while mowing my overgrown lawn. Frank smiled when I told him about it and drove me to Jersey City to a doctor friend of his for my first-ever shot of cortisone, which healed it in a few days.

A few years later, I was driving home at 5:15 p.m. from Kearny Works. As I reached the main highway, a steel lug shattered the passenger side window of my car, hit the visor in front of me, and landed above my right eye, cutting it before falling into my lap. Although I was in shock, I had the presence of mind to get off the highway and return to Kearny, where we had a mini hospital for our thousands of

employees. They bandaged the eye, Frank arranged for someone to drive me home. The next day, he took my wounded car to Jersey City and had the car cleaned out and the window replaced. There are many other stories I could tell you about the ways he helped me, but I think you get the point. By the way, my other dear friend Charlie Kiamie took the rusty steel lug and had it cleaned up, coated with some kind of metal, and had the date inscribed. I still use it as a paper weight, and it's someplace on one of my many tables.

Frank Adamchak's son was a Section Chief at Kearny, got himself into difficulty, and was heavily penalized and transferred to New York City. The young man was extremely distraught as he was being transferred back to Kearny, and didn't know how he would cope with his previous colleagues. Frank asked if I could speak to him, and give him some advice. I spoke at length with the young man, explained that he had paid for his transgression, and now could resume his previous life confidently. He was very happy, and I was pleased that I could repay Frank just a little bit for his considerable assistance.

Like most of my colleagues, Frank passed away while I was coping with life.

Dick Gray

It's difficult searching memories for specific dates, as they recede into that era of your life which are called the "middle years." Your kids have finished their education and are pursuing their goals in life, your finances are becoming manageable, and you carve out time from work to check off items on your "would like to-do" list. High on my list was playing tennis and joining a poker group. I think in the mid-1980s I was invited to join a poker group of co-workers, most of whom had already played together for years. When I met Dick, I learned two important things about him. First of all,

he was a very likeable, intelligent guy, and he was an excellent poker player.

I didn't know it at the time, but I got to know Dick, and here in 2025, I'm honored to think of him as a good friend. It also turned out, he became the secretary, coordinator, facilitator, and spokesperson for our ever-changing group of poker players for more years than I can remember. His delightful wife Dianne, a former secretary at Cranford High School, has been the unofficial cheerleader in residence and has actually filled in at the card table a few times. She and I enjoy talking about our mutual gardens, and she gave me my first-ever "giant" kohlrabi.

Although my failing eyesight and other health factors have prevented me from attending those wonderful sessions at the New Jersey Shore, I still talk with Dick occasionally. The games have continued, but not as frequently as in the previous years.

Billy Stroebel

Another good friend I met across the poker table is Billy Stroebel. Besides our mutual love for poker, Billy and I share a strong interest in professional sports, and often have discussions about our favorite teams. Prior to moving from his Bridgewater, New Jersey, home to Ocean Grove, Billy showed his one-of-a-kind room filled with New York Giants football memorabilia. It was one of the most voluminous assortments I had ever seen. After touring that jam-packed room, you knew Billy's favorite football team intimately.

Most of the time our poker group would order pizza from a local restaurant, but occasionally Billy and his personable wife Diane would put together a tasty stew, which was so popular that second helpings were always happily accepted by the happy players. I am one of the lucky ones who

is safeguarding a few empty containers that the Stroebls had filled when sending me home with delicious doggy bags of Diane's sumptuous stews.

Bill and Diane are among the few snowbird members of the poker group, basking in the Florida sunshine during the cold winter months. I consider Billy and Diane one of my favorite couples.

Dave Shaver

Another one of those Bell System friends, Dave Shaver, was a long-time member of the poker group. He, too, is one of those snowbirds, who with his elegant wife Kate lives the rest of the year in Florida. In fact, Dave and Kate made their permanent home in the Sarasota area, and come to the Jersey Shore for a couple of months a year.

Dave retired as a vice president of public relations for a spin-off of the old AT&T. During his earlier years, he had added me to his small tennis group for an occasional match. We often teamed up as doubles partners against former colleagues. Dave has a wry sense of humor, and I thoroughly enjoyed our few social occasions, trading repartee with my quick-witted, very likeable friend.

Dave is one of those people I listened to carefully because although he's a man of few words, the ones he speaks usually are filled with wisdom. When we worked at AT&T, I considered him to be one of the very respected officers. To me he exemplified the person who got ahead in life but "never lost the common touch."

Irene Campanelli

A long-time friend from my working days at Kearny a second time, is Irene Campanelli of Edison and her family.

We worked together, later car-pooled, occasionally I was a dinner guest at their lovely home and she and her family sometimes shared my long-ago abundant gardens. I watched her daughters Krissy and Emily grow up, graduate from Kean University where I was teaching, and become employed in occupations that help other human beings. Her husband Mike also retired from the Bell System and enjoys being a senior citizen. For a while he worked at The Home Depot.

During our period of working together at Kearny, Irene, who was extremely bright and quick to learn, was often used to troubleshoot when a project not in her area of responsibility was stuck with inertia. We have found over the 52 years that I have known her that we have very similar literary, theatrical and musical interests. Her frequent recommendations always are enjoyable and are usually first-rate. Many of our conversations often include our growing grandchildren.

Here over one-half century later Irene and I reminisce often about the work climate of those thousands of people who traveled to the Kearny Plant each day to carry out the functions assigned to them. That sprawling complex of several enormous building supported the often extremely noisy manufacturing practices of pounding, shaping, and extruding the combination of metal and plastic into the apparatus of communicating information through cable and wires... before I learned that the information I was seeking resided in the cloud! We now talk often about our friends who roamed those corridors in those many-tiered buildings.

Rarely do we ever dwell on those giants of industry who resided on Mahogany Row, where the strategic decisions were planned and carried out which affected those workers who carried out their appointed tasks in that huge work complex. We didn't recall their functions, but what they were like as human beings and that's how we remember them. Irene's sister Mary mailed me a copy of the old Kearny phone book.

I spent hours leafing through it and picturing the faces of those countless names listed therein. Most of the people are departed, and we are left with the impact that their personalities and styles had on us. Interestingly how each memory has a different effect on us. Some are unforgettable, others hardly leave a ripple on the sea of time.

Whereas our discussions usually involve the latest books we've read or TV programs we've seen, no small time is devoted to the numerous aches and pains the aging process has wreaked upon our bodies.

The only time we have sad conversations is when we discuss the vast number of losses of those fine people we worked with during our early work careers at Kearny. We lament the fact that there are so very few of us left to converse about the good old days. Being more than two decades older than Irene, after my 94th birthday I am keenly aware that most parts of my body have passed their "best use by" date.

The Biba Family

One of my good fortunes was meeting Jane, Paul, and Erin Biba in 1984. Over 40 years ago, Jane and I were competing for the same job opening, reporting to Tom Thomsen, President of the then AT&T Technologies. I was very lucky because he decided to open a second position and take us both.

In addition to collaborating at work for an exceptional executive, Jane and I got to be personal friends. I got to watch her husband Paul and Jane raise Erin, a bright and gifted writer, who has added so much to humankind. As fortune would have it, after many years when the deadly Covid virus reaped havoc on the world and our country, the four of us formed a pod, continuing to mask up, avoid crowded gatherings, and so far have escaped unscathed.

We all look forward to Thanksgiving where New Yorker Erin does the cooking and always presents a sumptuous meal for all of us at the Biba home in Bernardsville. I am never angry that she loads me up with huge caches of tasty leftovers which sustain me for days.

Paul gave me my first Kindle, and I now use it almost exclusively for all of my book reading. I have enjoyed the many tours of the spacious Biba home in Bernardsville, where daughter Erin also maintains a large, productive garden. Over the past years, while I was having a garden, she made sure I had all the seedlings I wanted to satisfy my taste for fresh vegetables. Erin is also the devoted and caring owner of her feisty and very loving aide-de-camp, her cat Mal. Although I have to tip my hat to Erin because of her brilliance, there are times that I feel Mal is in charge.

I still cook periodically, and we exchange recipes from my mother's cookbook. Paul also has great expertise in electronic gadgets which have always been a challenge to me, and we also find common interests in discussing subjects like his visits to Japan, a place I lived in and enjoyed immensely.

I also have benefited greatly from my friend and her family because in addition to food and health advice, Jane specifically has been my chauffeur and counsel during my increasingly numerous visits to doctors. It's very beneficial when I need to be sedated or just want the moral support. Even the longhand words that I am writing for this book have been typed and edited by my good friend.

I consider myself fortunate to have befriended the multi-talented Biba family over the past four decades.

Wanda McDonald and Karen Lee

I can't consider the story of my journey through life completed without taking the time to pay homage to the very

able secretaries at AT&T. I want to tell you about my contact with two of them who exemplified the very best of a group critical to the functioning of the business at the time.

Wanda McDonald was the assistant to AT&T Technologies President Tom Thomsen, and Karen Lee served a similar role with one of his General Managers, Bob Harlan, a fine gentleman.

I want to tell all members of my family that very early on I learned that a large percentage of what made my work assignments successful was to have a good, close, respectful relationship with the executives' secretaries. Many of us vied for time with our executives so that we could fully understand their goals, wants, and needs. It was their secretaries who granted you access to those important people...or fended you off and hampered your ability to succeed. I was most fortunate in both relationships I just cited. It was very important to know each of them and understand what made their assignments enjoyable and easy-flowing. They both were exceptionally talented persons who took great pride in having their respective ships sail smoothly through the oceans of corporate challenges.

I considered myself to be a good friend of both Wanda and Karen. Sadly I recently read that Wanda passed away in 2016 and her husband Leo followed several years later. To date, I still exchange Christmas cards with Karen and her husband Arnie, who have raised their family in New England. Befriending both of these warm, intelligent women was one of the nicest aspects of my career at AT&T, and I am indebted to both of them.

Tom Thomsen

I think it's fitting to end this section by talking about one of the most impressive executives that I had the pleasure

of working for. T.R. Thomsen served as president of AT&T Technologies in the 1980s, right around the breakup of The Bell System. The Kearny Works, where I was employed, was one of the units under his jurisdiction. When Kearny was being phased out in the early 1980s I was transferred to Tommy's staff, where I closed out my 33-year career accepting an early retirement in 1990. For several years prior to his retirement, Tom also headed up the Telephone Pioneers of America, a charitable organization of volunteers whose goal was to support needy causes in their local communities.

My last few years, I had the good fortune of working as his executive assistant, doing whatever public relations or communication job that was required of me, and often traveling to far-off places on a corporate jet with Tom. He was the best executive you could ever work for because he taught me, included me in his work, made my experiences memorable, and let me know that my efforts were appreciated. His lovely wife Raylene usually attended these engagements required by President Thomsen, and I enjoyed being included and treated as an important member of his team. In fact, in a few occasions, when a conflict in his busy schedule necessitated it, he sent me to represent his interests. I also recall the smile on his face when a few "bumpy" flights needed his calm, steady dialog to see me through some scary moments.

Tommy Thomsen was one of the few people that I met in my lifetime who was always comfortable in his own skin, under complete control and, despite his great intelligence and success, never impressed with himself. I considered him to be the perfect model of what a successful American executive should be. I also have the good fortune of still staying in touch with Tom and Raylene with occasional visits, lunches and annual Christmas cards.

I will never forget his generosity, kindness, and warmth in my final years with AT&T Technologies.



Honeymooning in
Florida, the beginning
of our journey.



Jo poses for a painting
in her Kearny days.



Jo and I admiring baby Gregg in
our Lyndhurst, NJ, apartment.



Chris, Meg, and Gregg
celebrating Christmas at
Saville Row, Fanwood.



Gregg's submarine, on which he sailed under many oceans to far-away lands during his tour of duty.



Chris, Meg with Bonnie, and Annapolis student Gregg during one of our many weekend visits.



The Hobbie family at our first visit to North Carolina Governor Bob Scott's residence in Raleigh.



My long-time friends, the Biba Family – Erin, Paul and Jane – in their beautiful, warm home.



Raylene and Tom Thomsen, the exceptional executive I had the good fortune to work for in my final 5 years at AT&T Technologies.

Chapter 6:

Teaching After Western Electric

I considered my options when I took an early retirement, and didn't want to go back to routine public relations work after working for Tom Thomsen in my best-ever assignment. I concluded that my earlier experience of the 2 years traveling the country and conducting 3-day workshops qualified me to teach public speaking.

I believed I had a marketable skill, so I answered an ad at Union County Community College for an adjunct professor position, and was interviewed by the late Dr. Andrea Green, the department head who had filed my application. A few weeks later, she called me the day before classes started and offered me a class in Dynamics of Communication. I said to her I didn't believe I was qualified to teach it. She said all I had to do was to follow the textbook, and that it was a first cousin to Public Speaking. She kept repeating that she was taking a chance on me, and that I must not let her down. I finally realized that she was probably stuck at this late date without a professor, and grabbed my papers and took a chance with me.

It turned out that I enjoyed teaching Dynamics of Communication, and kept learning about the course and me as each semester went by. I was also teaching at Kean University by then, and found myself teaching six courses, running back and forth between both campuses five days a week. In fact, I was asked by Dr. Green to fill in teaching an English literature course for a full-timer for several weeks because she was undergoing an operation. I boned up on that course, and had a ball teaching it. Later, Dr. Green underwent a lengthy hospital stay, and requested that I also substitute for her mid-way through the semester. I was temporarily classified as a full-timer with a great increase in pay for those several months. While at Kean, I was a judge for the annual poetry contests, which I found very rewarding.

As a side note, I ran into a Western Electric chauffeur many years ago, who told me that one day when I was with him that I talked about wanting to teach at the college level. Interestingly, my boss at AT&T wrote an evaluation saying that I was a so-so PR person, but that I should be transferred to the Corporate Education Center (CEC) in Princeton because teaching was my strong suit. I have no idea what he saw that could make him say that, but I think he was right. The reason I only would teach at the collegiate level, I felt that neither high school students nor I would have sufficient patience in those courses.

I tried to introduce well-known public figures when giving students examples that they could understand. I used Marlon Brando often to make a point, and it proved very successful. I used Marlon Brando to show how we all perceive the world differently. I would show his tee shirt clothed photo up and down the aisle and ask each student to tell the class the one word that came to mind when they looked at him. Two young ladies sitting next to one another at Kean University said the following: The first student said, "Gay." And the one looking at the same picture who sat opposite her said, "Stud." The class roared at that time of old stereotypes.

I believe I was successful in blending humor into my communication courses because I used material from my speeches at the Speakers Bureau at Western Electric. I feel another reason I was successful in my 33-year teaching career at three different colleges and at work in Western Electric, the audience and my students enjoyed the brand of humor...it kept them from becoming bored. One day while I was giving an exam in Dynamics of Communication at Union Community College, the class was interrupted by a vice president, who called me out into the hallway. She had one of my students in tow, who had been involved in a very slight fender bender in the parking lot, but did not want to miss taking her exam. The vice president asked that I be sure to escort her to her car after class because she was a little shaky. A very bright older married student, the wife of a professor at the school, overheard the conversation, and volunteered to escort the young lady to her car after class. I said to the volunteer,

"You are so cool. Thank you very much." She smiled, looked up from her desk, and said, "No, Prof Norm. You are the cool one." The entire class instantly began to applaud. Ordinarily I would be hesitant to include an anecdote that cast me in such a favorable light. But what I think this really illustrates is the bond that can form in a class like this – particularly one about interpersonal relationships. And that's a bond enabled by the professor but not created solely by the professor. It's the result of students and teacher together creating a laboratory of trust in which communications not only can be learned but can flourish. This did not always happen, but when it did, it was satisfying for all involved.

Some of my teaching assignments came under a state or federal program called, "Project Inside." It involved community colleges teaching five or six courses for the inmates (students) of the jails and prisons in the state. These college-credit courses counted toward obtaining a degree, and you could earn 24 credits while incarcerated. The hope would be that you would continue your education after you served your sentence. I taught in seven of the prisons while the program was in existence. I believe one of our governors eventually defunded it after a number of years.

I taught many classes at the prisons because Dynamics of Communication was one of the most popular courses offered. Also, most professors were not comfortable teaching in a prison or jail. Each facility had its own set of rules. The old Rahway Prison, now renamed East Jersey, was the strictest because they functioned under a movement rule. You could only enter and leave at specific times, when all the gates were opened and then closed. If you missed the movement, you had to wait a long time for the next one to take place. There were no exceptions, and you quickly learned to go with the flow. East Jersey also contained the toughest cross-section of inmates. Many were in for long sentences, and were the hard-core. I had to work the hardest there because I was constantly being challenged. I had to show no fear, and assert my authority through a strong knowledge of the material I was teaching.

I recall at the Hudson County Jail, I was teaching several classes, and the college added a professor to handle one of the classes. I was asked to brief him, and when I tried to explain my fearless approach, he disagreed with me strongly, telling me that I should become their friend and be buddies with them. After one semester, the prison officials asked the college to never send him there again because the students “played him,” getting him to bring in contraband items and break many prison rules. The college let him go shortly thereafter. When I was asked what had caused his behavior, I said, “We had a difference in philosophy.” Depending on the situation, sometimes “nice guys finish last.” In most prisons, there’s a button on the wall to be pressed if you experience an emergency.

I believe I pressed the button only once, but on a few occasions, when I tossed a student who refused to leave, I said, “I can push that wall button or you can leave quietly. You choose.” Even if they hesitated, they always left except that one time. It was not pretty because the officers were not gentle in removing him, and it took a while to win back the class. I was never quick to toss out a student, but after tolerating continuous disobedience, I came down quickly. The rest of the students saw it, and the classes ran smoothly once they realized not to “mess” with the Lone Ranger!

In one case, a show-off kept interrupting my comments. Eventually he cursed me, and I said, pointing to the door, “You’re out of here!” He wouldn’t leave, and I said to the other students, “Class will not continue until he’s gone.” Soon the other students began to turn to look at him in the back of the room, so he got up and left, slamming the door after him. A short time later, a female director opened the door and harshly said to me, “I want to talk to you,” with the ejected student standing behind her. I told her I was in the middle of explaining something to the class, and to wait outside until I finished my comments. A few minutes later I went into the hallway to hear her order me to reinstate the student I had tossed. I asked her where her office was, and that when the students had their 15-minute break, I would come to her office to discuss the matter. It gave me a chance to plan what I was going to say

to her. When I later visited her office around the corner, she gave me a half-assed excuse that he had not gotten enough sleep and therefore was cranky. I told her I had given him several chances already, and was not about to have him mess up the class for all these other students. She said the head administrator of the prison wanted him back in my class, and therefore I had to allow him back in. I told her the college I represented did not lower its standards, and to let me know when the administrator wanted to discuss the matter with me. I never saw her again.

A few events I recall while teaching in the prison surprised me. The students at East Jersey were about to take a written exam when I noticed a very tough-looking student bless himself, act very piously, and pick up his pencil to begin. Somehow that picture did not go with his personality and I was a little shocked. At the Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility in Annandale, New Jersey, at the conclusion of the course, one student asked if he could hug me instead of shaking hands. Of course, we did. The program was for inmates up to their mid-20s.

At Northern Jersey Prison near Newark Airport, a janitor-inmate sweeping up after class asked me why he couldn't get into the program because he was 30. I advised him to respectfully request it from the local authorities to see if they would make an exception. The program was cancelled soon thereafter, so I doubt he got in.

I taught senior citizen classes in Westfield and Summit, and they had their own challenges. It didn't take long for me to find out that most of them were not there to learn but to be entertained. I cannibalized the Dynamics of Communication course, threw out a few of the tests, melded in anything humorous I could find, and taught by the seat of my pants. Those senior citizens wanted a new social setting to find some new friends and chat away. My first class blew my mind, until I realized they were not going to change...so I did. I tried to feed off those few students who wanted to learn, and I suppose that it made me feel of value into my 70s, 80s and 90s, to be able to earn a few dollars for my efforts. It was an endorsement of what I was raised valuing, the ability to bring home a paycheck.

A result of my very heavy load of teaching was a slight heart attack, and I was advised by my cardiologist to reduce my teaching load. I had been teaching for 20 years at Kean, so I retired with a New Jersey State Pension. Had I known Union County College's intention, I would have continued at Kean and retired from UCC. A few years after I retired from Kean, UCC let go a dozen adjunct professors who did not have a master's degree, leaving me without classes after 25 years teaching there. Needless to say, I was not happy, so I reluctantly put in for retirement. I left vowing never to contribute one more penny to my UCC alma mater...and I have kept my word. I was especially disappointed because I had gone to that college and received a degree, was a class officer, captain of the basketball team, sports editor of the school paper, doubles table tennis champion, and suddenly I had a very bitter taste in my mouth about that college.

On my forced retirement day, I drove over to one of my favorite restaurants, The Spanish Tavern in Mountainside, and ordered a very large luncheon of my favorite dishes. While I was enjoying those savory dishes, Manuel Garcia, one of the owners and a long-time friend who had worked at AT&T International, came over to my table and sat with me. I told him my tale of woe, and said that I wanted to enjoy his wonderful food and not think about the nasty turn in my happy life. We talked for about 30 minutes, and I must say he lifted my spirits. He left and when I completed that tasty luncheon, I called the waiter over to ask for my large bill, and was told, "No Professor. Manuel told me that today, for you, it's compliments of the house." I was shocked because it was totally unexpected and made me aware that my friend Manuel wanted to lift me out of my doldrums. He succeeded because I was so elated at his sensitivity that I immediately shook off my unhappy mood and vowed to continue teaching someplace. I left a very large tip for the waiter.

I then went home and phoned my friend Frank Mertz, former president of Fairleigh Dickinson University for 10 years who was now retired. He called the next day to say that he had arranged an interview with the FDU Theater Department. It happened that at that

time Public Speaking classes were the responsibility of the Theater Department. They have since been moved to the English Department. After an interview, I was hired by a fine gentleman who said he waived the lack of a master's degree because I had taught at Kean for 20 years, UCC for 25 years, and at Western Electric had been head of the Speakers Department for 2 years. After 5 wonderful years at FDU, I retired because I could no longer drive in the rain and because of the lingering fear of COVID. Those 5 years at FDU were the best teaching situation I was in, and I left on a very happy note. I miss those wonderful FDU classes! My thoughts about my 33-year teaching career are positive because, thanks to Manuel Garcia and Frank Mertz, I took the bitter lemons given to me by UCC and made them into tasty lemonade. I believe that Manuel and his brothers sold the Route 22 Spanish Tavern, but I don't know the status of the original restaurant in Newark. If it weren't for the rain and COVID, I'd still be happily teaching at FDU.

The wonderful thing about teaching those last years at FDU is that it enabled me to discover a technique that proved to be enormously helpful to students, many of whom had a fear of public speaking. I heard the expression "storytelling" from one of the professors and found that my own version was very effective. I wish I could have been in the audience when I gave them a demonstration: I held up an old photograph of my mother Essie and myself (about 40 years old with a mustache) and proceeded to tell them a story that she was the head of the Gambling Syndicate and I was her enforcer. Each student was then required to use the same photo and create their own story about Essie and me. The stories were hilarious, as they tried to outdo one another in their creativity. They never thought about being nervous because they were having so much fun. When the exercise was over, I told them who the two people were, and it brought down the house. Most of all, they couldn't believe it was me, and pleaded to look at the photo more closely. This was only one of the ways I used storytelling to distract students from their nervousness. I miss those days, when I could help them overcome their fear of public speaking.

It's a wonderful feeling when you've been able to help others who are struggling with issues in their lives.

Another reason I was successful teaching public speaking: Many students told me they couldn't think of a topic to speak about. I always challenged them to sit with me at my desk for a few minutes, and I would convince them otherwise. I never lost a challenge. I would ask them questions about their lives, and using their responses, suggest topic after topic until the smiles on their faces told me they'd found a topic to their liking. The smiles were always followed by an enthusiastic, "I got it. I got it." And they would leap up from the chair at my desk and hurry away. When other students saw that interaction, they would argue with one another as to who should be next. It was one of the best parts of teaching public speaking.

I'm about to celebrate with information that comes under the heading, "I've lived long enough to learn...." I just saw that the Los Angeles School Board has banned smart phones from all its schools. Hurray! Hurray! Better late than never.

If you attended any of my classes during my entire 33 years of teaching, you would have seen and heard the following on the first day of class. As I held up my tiny flip-top cell phone, I would say, "You may not recognize this, but this is a cell phone. In this class you are not allowed to use it at any time except during your 15-minute break. Many of you are so addicted to your phones that you will still try to use it, hidden from sight. For your information, guys will try to palm it and place it on their inner thighs. Women tend to hide it behind books, purses, packages, sometimes placing it in their lap. Let me caution you. I have an advanced PhD in cell phone detection, so let me ask you a question. Do you think when I catch you accessing your phones, do you think the mark I place next to your name will help your final grade or hurt it?

"At the end of the semester, when I am calculating your final grade, many of them will be right on the border of two grades. So if I add just a smidgen for your overall good behavior, you'll get the

higher grade. If there are marks next to your name, you'll never receive the next higher grade. By the way, I did not make and follow this rule religiously because I dislike my students. Contrarily, I love teaching and enjoy my students. However, I know from studies I've read, no one can multitask and give 100% to each effort. When you use your cell phone while trying to learn the course material simultaneously, something will suffer. I give no homework except for the six talks for grade. All the learning for this course occurs during class time. When you multitask, your chances of learning the classroom material are diminished. So are there any questions about the use of the cell phone?"

So what now appears as illustrated by the Los Angeles Board that some educators are finally realizing the use of the smart phone in the classroom is an issue that has to be addressed. Does this mean there's hope? Only time will tell.

While I have your attention, I beg you, please do not text and drive. That split second of divided attention may one day end your or somebody else's life or alter your life irrevocably. If the message is that important, pull off the road and send it. Life is so precious. It's impossible to prevent yourself from having an aneurysm, heart attack, or any of the other multitude of health issues that can occur to any of us. But what we can control is where and when we use our smart phones. Please resist the temptation and don't take that gamble.

I want my students to remember me as a caring professor, who tried to prepare them for the challenges they would face after graduation. I love that some students at Kean University told the administration they wanted to teach these courses because they saw how happy I was doing so. The last words in every class that I taught summarized the most important aspects of what I tried to teach them. More importantly, they contained life lessons I gained that might help them deal with the quandaries they would face for the rest of their lives.

Other folks I'll never forget
Debbie Ustas

Debbie came into my life in a most unusual way. While a student at Pace University in New York City, she wrote her thesis about AT&T and mailed it to Charlie Brown, the then-CEO of my parent company. Western Electric was the manufacturing arm, one of AT&T's several subsidiaries. CEO Brown liked the report, sent it to his public relations organization, where it was decided to hire Debbie as an intern. Because she lived in New Jersey, probably somebody said, "Let's send her over to Western Electric's Kearny Works."

As public relations manager, it was my good fortune to have Debbie work in my organization, doing various kinds of jobs. As a recent college graduate she tried to acclimate her life's routines to the rigors of adhering to a precise work schedule, which was not easy. We had several in-depth discussions on the matter, and the very educable Debbie quickly mastered her responsibilities and completed her internship with a stellar performance.

After she left, she mentioned that she was going to continue her education. I didn't fully comprehend what her goal was until a few years later I received an invitation to attend her graduation from law school. It happened at the time I had undergone a hernia operation and found it difficult to mingle in a crowd, so I sent my regrets. However, she convinced me to join her celebration at the Jersey Shore, where her large family applauded her accomplishment with a small private party. I did so, and had a brief but enjoyable visit with her personable father and attractive sisters.

We somewhat stayed in touch through a few letters, and sometime later I was surprised to receive an invitation to her swearing in as a superior court judge. I attended and watched her don the robes of a New Jersey Superior Court Judge.

During her acceptance speech, she credited her Western Electric internship with turning her life around. Afterwards, as part of the event, we had an exceptionally memorable luncheon at a country club in northern New Jersey – with extremely tasty food.

A few years past, with occasional letters between us, and then one day Debbie called, inviting me to dinner in the Ironbound section of Newark. We met, and she looked wonderful, as we talked about what it was like for her on some of the cases that would appear before her. As we parted, I said, “Let’s do this again in a few months.” She replied, “This was a lot of fun. Let’s do it sooner, I’ll give you a call when my schedule is less hectic.” We hugged and I left so happy to know that my friend had done so exceptionally well in the past few years.

I was a little disappointed when I didn’t hear from Debbie again, but I decided not to add stress to her very busy schedule by contacting her. After a year, I decided to check her status, and was shocked to find out that she had passed away on my birthday a few months after our last dinner at the young age of 50.

I learned that she had an aggressive form of cancer, and was under treatment when we had our last catch-up dinner in Newark. Her wig maker wrote in an article I read that she provided Debbie with several styles during her last months to allow her to appear in public looking good. I can attest to the fact that Debbie looked very good on the evening of our last meal together. She was at the height of her judicial career when she was struck down. I still mourn for the loss of such a special, accomplished young friend.

Dr. Freda Remmers

When I began my teaching career at Kean University, Dr. Remmers was one of the most powerful voices in the

Communication Department...and she was responsible for the most advanced and difficult course, Group Communication. She took me under her wing, so to speak, and helped me to take the knowledge I had acquired in life and apply it to the youngsters who were ready to begin their transition to a working society. Her advice was invaluable, and I soon became very comfortable in that role. I taught several sections of Speech Communication. After observing one of my classes, Dr. Remmers stated that I would be her back-up instructor for the Group Communication classes. For the next 20 years, I taught both courses at Kean, as well as three classes at Union Community College. Unfortunately, in 2013 at the age of 82 because I was teaching 6 classes running between the two schools, I experienced my minor heart attack. Dr. Remmers was truly my most important mentor when learning how to teach at the college level. I felt that Dr. Remmers and I had developed a warm, collegial relationship during my years at Kean.

Bob and Joyce Hobbie

My brother Bob, the baby in the family, has retired from a long, successful career as a kind, caring, outstanding pediatrician in Fairfield, Connecticut. That now-86-year-old doesn't seem retired because he and Joyce are often visiting their Virginia families, Melissa, a lawyer, and Dr. Karen, who moved there several years ago. I often get messages as they're either leaving, arriving, or returning from happy gatherings of their entire family.

Many years ago, Joyce, an outstanding calligrapher, put together an extensive book of recipes from my mother's kitchen. Using those instructions as a guide, I have been able to prepare several dishes, which my children and their families have been enjoying. Over the years, I also have made many copies of Joyce's creation and given them to friends.

Each time I receive a thank you phone call from a contented recipient, I whisper, “Thank you, Joyce.”

The retired Bob also maintains his large Fairfield property, which for years has featured a large, well-organized, productive fenced-in vegetable garden. Needless to say, Bob and Joyce enjoy all this fresh produce almost all year round.

In my own case, I declared a truce with the rabbits, squirrels, birds and a few deer, which have totally ravished my garden one time too often. That area has been replanted as a lawn. I now use a few large growing pots to provide me with some of my favorite vegetables. The rest I will continue to obtain from the well-stocked supermarkets, farm stands, and dear friends like Erin Biba.

As far as Bob and Joyce’s daughters, Melissa and Karen, I have very fond memories of them growing up. They were exceptional equestrians and they gave our beloved dog Bonnie a beautiful retirement home on the family’s extensive property. They grew up to have exciting professions – Karen a doctor and Melissa a lawyer – and they now live in the same state, Virginia, which must make it very comfortable for Bob and Joyce to now enjoy their entire family in one visit. I have poignant memories of their grandfather Bill on our trips to Connecticut many years ago when so much of our conversation revolved around his love for his granddaughters. They continue to be very active. Karen and her husband Brian are raising Brooke, Anna, and Nicholas, while Melissa and her husband Scott have Lily to round out Bob and Joyce’s grandchildren. As you can see from a photograph taken some years ago, that’s what proud grandparents look like.

Ed and Pat Hobbie

Looking through the prism of my elderly eyes, I don’t see my younger brother much more differently than when

he was while growing up. He was, and still is, an honorable, intelligent, personable, fair, and trustworthy human being, who adheres to strong values of right and wrong. Perhaps that's why he was such an effective judge for over a decade.

We converse periodically, often reminiscing about a beloved ancestor or some story about our youth. He is semi-retired, and with his incomparable wife Patty, spend time in their picturesque Westfield home or at their Long Beach Island shore home, enjoying the pleasures of leisure. They spend the first three months of every year on the east coast of Florida before returning north in April to resume their New Jersey living. Before raising her wonderful family, Patty had been an elementary school at Sherman School located just a few steps away from her childhood home.

Ed and Patty are very supportive of their family, which includes daughter Laura and son Ted, who also have homes in Westfield, and son Mark who resides in Cranford. Mark does the heavy lifting at Ed and Mark's law practice in Cranford. All three were very much a part of our family get-togethers as they were growing up. Laura in particular was very close to her Grandma Essie, spent many hours visiting her and has hilarious stories to tell about Essie and Sitto's reactions to TV sitcoms and other aspects of our evolving world. Mark and Teddy went through the Westfield school system and college very involved in sports, and I was at an age when I had the free time that I could attend many of their events. Teddy excelled in the traditional Hobbie enthusiasm for baseball and basketball. Mark played basketball and then diversified into swimming and golf, winning a championship in the latter sport.

I want to tell you about a role that fate played in the lives of myself and my young brothers. It took place in late 1953 and could have completely overturned our lives. I had just graduated from CIC School at Fort Holabird. During the few months of my training there, I had received various

types of instruction including the handling of weapons, large and small. Unfortunately, I was filled with the bravado and overconfidence that can come with that kind of knowledge. I was back home in Cranford on a weekend pass when my two younger brothers joined my mother Esther and me in the kitchen. The younger boys kind of looked up to me, and I was feeling extremely cocky as a bonafide CIC agent. I asked my mother to get the Luger which my parents were keeping for a friend in the Midwest and which they stored in their bedroom. When I took that pistol from my mother, I began eloquently describing the handling of a firearm, showing off to those two dear youngsters as I explained how you hold the pistol, how you point it – as I leveled it at the older boy, aiming squarely at his chest. I explained how it was important to firmly squeeze – not pull – the trigger. Just as I was about to finish squeezing the trigger so that they could hear the click, a sudden thought ran through my head. I heard First Sergeant Brown's voice in basic training say to me in his strong tone, "Never point your weapon at someone unless you intend to kill him!" I quickly released my light pressure on the trigger and began examining the Luger. I removed the clip and checked the chamber. I was shocked when I saw a bullet in the chamber ready to be fired. Had I completed squeezing that trigger, I would have destroyed my happy family! I was absolutely stunned by how close I came to murdering my kid brother. I returned the now-empty Luger to my mother and hid the bullets in my dresser drawer so they could never cause an "accident." Every so many years, I reflect on the events of that day. I think of my now 88-year-old brother and his many, many achievements, raising a wonderful family, and I shiver at the thought that I almost committed the worst tragedy in my life. Had I followed through with my unintentional, family-destroying blunder, I, too, would have been devastatingly affected. I never could have gone on to pursue

an enjoyable life, married, raised three exceptional children, enjoyed eight wonderful grandchildren and even a great-grandson. That fulfilling life would have been unattainable had that catastrophe occurred. I will be eternally grateful for the intrusion of First Sergeant Brown's powerful voice when it mattered most.

As a pleasant follow up, I recently recounted this story to Ed and he had absolutely no recollection of the event. Which made me very happy because it meant he had trusted me and never felt the least bit threatened. It was not important enough for him to even remember my weapons tutorial.

Before I leave Ed and Pat, what more do I know about their descendants? Besides partnering with Ed in their well-respected law firm, Mark, who lives around the corner from me, loves the Jersey Seashore. In fact, he and his brother Ted have purchased a home at the Jersey Shore, one family upstairs, the other downstairs. Ted, who works in finance services, and his wife Maria are parents to daughter Sarah and son Luke. Daughter Laura is retiring after a long career in teaching and leadership roles. Her son Matthew and daughter Rebecca have both graduated from college and are both living in New York City, where they are working for different companies. Both my younger brothers have excelled in their lives, achieving both professionally and personally, and are fulfilling the promise evident in their earliest days. From their first entry into our family, I considered Ed and Bob to be cherished parts of my life, which continues to this day and now extends to their entire families.

Ernie and Jan

Ernie is the second of my siblings that I have lost in my lifetime. It was in 2013, and he had lived an active, productive 83 years. Because Ernie is no longer with us, I've used all

the data I have about him. Therefore, his vignette is much longer than the others because he'll never have an opportunity to explain himself in the future. I am doing it on his behalf now.

Ernie began school at the age of 4, and in subsequent years lost out participating in sports to older, physically more mature kids in the activities that mattered to him. However, his fierce competitive spirit wouldn't settle for mediocre, so he worked hard, got much tougher, and by the time he entered Newark State Teachers College (now Kean University), he took a back seat to no one.

His strongest sports were basketball and golf. He not only put up excellent numbers in his four years in college, more importantly he perfected the art of shooting one-handed, acquired the offensive and defensive strategic skills to be successful, and eventually became a teacher of effective basketball techniques. He had many students throughout the country from middle school, high school, college and even a few NBA professionals hire him to improve their shooting skills. He was known by several sports writers and TV announcers as "The Shot Doctor."

Ernie played golf into his 80s, and employed a cerebral approach to the game, which effectively provided him with a constantly respectable score. One of his golf buddies was Willie Mays, who passed away at 93. Willie was an influential athlete. Ernie taught in the Plainfield, New Jersey, school system, and he played golf with Willie at Shackamaxon Golf Course. He socialized with Willie and I believe he visited Ernie several times at one of Ernie's early homes. Don Newcombe and Joe Black, two baseball pitchers of that era, also played golf with them. Willie was a month older than I was, and he lived a long, successful life and left his mark in the record books. He was the most exciting baseball player I have ever watched.

Ernie married Jan while I was in Japan in the mid-1950s, and when I arrived home in June of '56, it was a few weeks before their son Jeff was born in July. He was soon joined by brothers Jon and Jerry in the next few years. Jeff exhibited an independent spirit from his earliest years, and grew up to be an extremely successful businessman. After graduating from college at Bowling Green, where his Grandfather Sawdy worked in the Athletic Department, Jeff ended up owning Uptown Downtown, a very popular nightclub. He went on to own and manage several similar business in other cities. He is a very intelligent, warm and caring member of our family.

Jon and Jerry followed in their father's expert basketball footsteps, excelling in high school and college. After graduating college, Jon joined Jeff in the Uptown Downtown business, and he and his partner Jesse manage Jeff's Airbnb. Jon is a gentle giant, the tallest of all the Hobbie grandchildren, with excellent abilities in baseball and basketball. He is a very warm and caring person who is quick to call me on all personal occasions and major sports events. He's taken up the mantle of the deep athletic analyses and conversations I always enjoyed with his father.

Jerry actually made a life of the Hobbie basketball talent. Jerry was a kid who could play pickup basketball games with the toughest kids around and always hold his own. While at Fordham University, he was a key member of a basketball dynasty. He has parlayed those abilities into several coaching positions at the collegiate level, and currently is an assistant at the University of Washington in Seattle. Coincidentally, my son Chris and his wife Marie were recently in Seattle and spent a lovely evening with Jerry and a girlfriend. Jerry is a great combination of his father's athletic and teaching abilities and his mother's talent for connecting with people. Since Ernie's passing, I'm happy to have maintained contact with Jerry through periodic telephone calls and correspondence.

Ernie's widow Jan still resides in the beautiful Wilmington, North Carolina, home that they had built years ago when Ernie retired as a middle school principal. Jan also graduated from Kean University and taught special needs children for many years. In addition to her educationally acquired field of expertise, Jan was also years ahead of her time when it came to one's nutritional health. I know that I and members of my family have benefited from her advice about nutrition over the years. Son Jeff now resides in Florida, Jon lives in Bowling Green, Ohio, with his partner Jesse, and Jerry lives in Seattle, Washington. All three are extremely caring sons and very attentive to their loving mother.

I miss Ernie, who played many roles in my life: He was a mentor, a leader, an advocate, a coach, a friend, and on a few occasions let me know that he was the boss. Several Ernie stories come to mind.

One incident happened around 1947 that illustrates Ernie's role in my life and his courage. Both of us were really skinny, and took a lot of kidding from classmates. I was a sub on the JV basketball team, and he played a similar role on the varsity. It was after practice, and I was sitting with a few players at our lockers getting ready to shower before leaving for home. One older player was picking on me, and I pretty much sat there and took it. Suddenly Ernie stepped in front of him and said, "Leave my brother alone!" and smacked him across the face. They went at it, and the coach, who only saw the ending, intervened and on the spot threw Ernie off the team.

To his credit, the boy who had picked on me quickly told the coach that he had started it, and Ernie was just defending his kid brother. The coach recanted, nothing more was said, and life continued.

A poignant moment occurred in 2013, a few weeks before we lost Ernie. I was visiting Ernie in the rehab center after his unsuccessful surgery. Jan and their son Jon were in

almost constant attendance, and Jan decided that Ernie was long overdue for a haircut. She checked the availability of the nearby barbershop in another wing of the rehab center while I got Ernie into a wheelchair. Understandably, at that moment Ernie had very little interest in a haircut.

When we arrived at the barber's office door, someone had just gotten into the chair, so we had to wait until he was shorn before Ernie's appointment. Ernie immediately wanted to return to his room and skip the haircut, but Jan pleaded with him to stay the course. In an effort to help out, I began wheeling Ernie on a sightseeing trip up and down the many corridors, engaging him in questions about the facility. That took about 15 minutes, and then Ernie wanted to return to his room and bed.

At this point, I need to interject some information about when we were kids...maybe 5 – 13... as my older brother and mentor, Ernie always expected me to listen to him. Most times I did. Occasionally I didn't. When I didn't, Ernie would say, "I'm getting mad," as a warning to me. He would repeat the warning, and if I didn't heed it, he would eventually say, "Now I'm really getting mad!" which meant I had better listen to him right away or else. When we began playing sports together in our mid-teens, that repartee disappeared from our relationship.

Now back to the haircut story when he was 83 and I was 82. When I was pushing Ernie's wheelchair as a time-consuming venture through the rehab center, he soon had enough. I suddenly heard, "I'm getting mad," which took me back nearly 70 years. I looked at Jan far away outside the barber's door, and gestured about the haircut status. She shook her head no, meaning I needed to stall somehow. At the same time, Ernie decided that was it. He turned his head, looked up at me in the same manner as when we were kids growing up on Winans Avenue, and said, "Now I'm really getting mad." The

combination of his words of our youth and all that entailed, the prognosis for his longevity, the insignificance of a haircut at that moment, caused me to begin weeping uncontrollably. Recognizing what had occurred, Ernie reached over his shoulder, put his hand on mine and said, "That's OK, Norm. I'll get the bleeping haircut!" I stopped crying, began laughing, and was under control by the time I got him to the barber's door. Some days later, Ernie passed away.

A beautiful memorial service was held by Jan and her family for Ernie in Wilmington. Many of us traveled down to attend, and I was very moved by the overflowing crowds of attendees from the community and from around the country. The speakers were eloquent with their remarks, and the heartfelt tribute by my nephew Jon spoke the words that really clutched at my emotions.

Ernie, through his basketball sessions and camps, gave much to the community, and Wilmington repaid him by building a beautiful outdoor basketball court with his face etched on each backboard and a nearby boulder with a plaque listing Ernie's rules to follow in order to become a good basketball player.

The following year, I visited Jan and, to honor Ernie, I drove over to "his" court to make a layup in the basket at each end of the court in his honor. I then learned an extremely perplexing life lesson which absolutely flabbergasted me. From an early childhood, I have shot thousands of times making baskets, but I had probably not touched a basketball in 30 years. I approached a basket at one end, took one dribble, and my brain told my body how to shoot the ball. I did and the ball rose about one foot over my head and came down again. I was absolutely stunned. I couldn't believe what happened. I tried it again with the same result. It was as though I had fired an old-fashioned cannon but forgot to put in the gunpowder! I stared in disbelief at the replay in

my mind completely baffled. I tried several more times with always the same results. So I tried something new. I ordered my brain to shoot the ball over the top of the backboard, not at the basket. It hit the bottom of the rim. After a few more attempts, the ball hit the backboard. Eventually I got to make an “easy” layup. I dribbled to the other end of the court, and by overthrowing the basket again, I was eventually able to make a layup. What I learned that day was that after 30 years that didn’t affect dribbling a basketball, it certainly destroyed all the depth perception, eye/hand coordination that I had developed throughout my life. How could I possibly know that somewhere in those 30 years my shooting touch had departed town for parts unknown! Although Jeff resides in Florida he visits Jan often to make sure she has support in anything she needs. He also stays for visits enjoying Jan’s beautiful home in Landfall. I, for one, enjoyed the opportunity to visit that top-rated beach in Wilmington, where Ernie and I held some very lengthy conversations as we waded on the edges of one of the most beautiful beaches I’ve seen. Jan recently returned from daughter Lea’s wedding in Texas. The father of the bride, Jerry, is an assistant basketball coach at the University of Washington in Seattle. Jerry’s other daughter Joanna lives in Los Angeles. Ernie’s third son, Jon, and his partner Jesse maintain Jeff’s Bowling Green home as a bed and breakfast. It’s nice to hear that Jan’s sons periodically visit and spend time with her in her Wilmington home. Jan and I have maintained a warm friendship and enjoy our periodical long and comprehensive conversations.

Sad to think that many of the people who were part of Ernie’s life are, like Ernie, also long gone. But in his 83 years he was a huge part of my life and touched so many others with his skill, knowledge, and love.



Jan Hobbie with son Jon enjoying one of Grandma Essie's buffets
– notice Charlie Kiamie Sr. in the background.



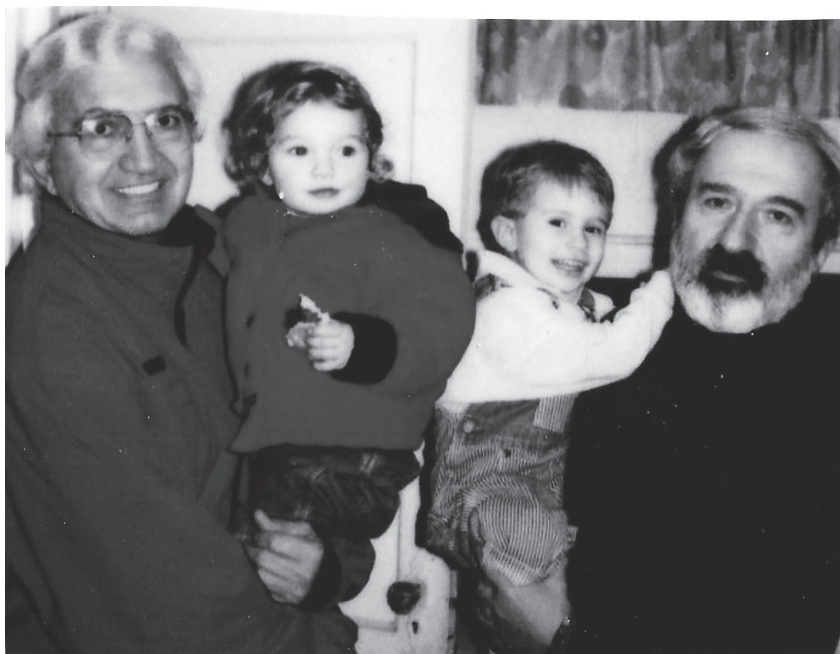
Jan with Jeff at a Hobbie family
get-together in the early 1960s.



Uncle Bob and niece Laura enjoying
a light moment.



Meg and I posing at an antique cannon.



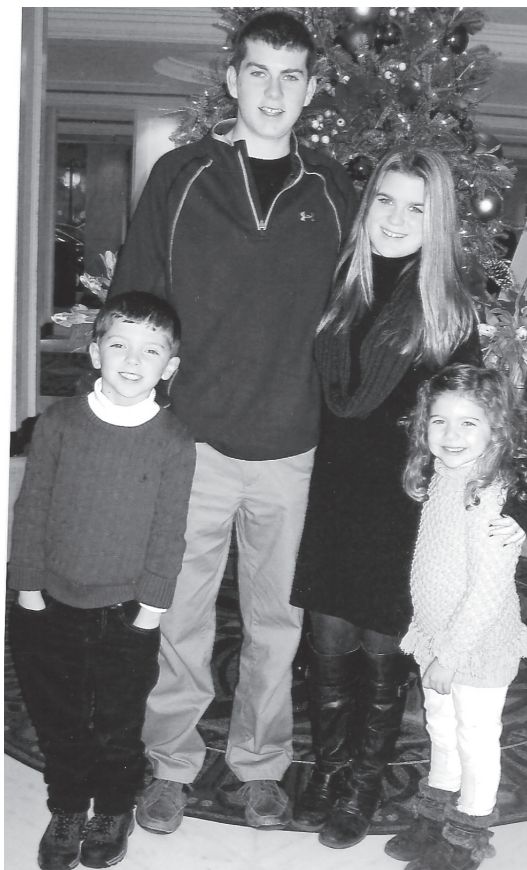
Ernie and I sharing the joys of grandfatherhood with Joanna and Drew.



Uncle Ed and son Mark visiting 90 Winans Avenue.



Uncle Ed and daughter Laura in the early days.



Ed and Pat's grandchildren:
Luke and Sarah Hobbie
flanking Matthew and
Rebecca Smoot.

Ed's children, Laura, Ted,
and Mark, at Gregg's
graduation from the Naval
Academy in 1981.





Jo's parents, Nanny and Poppy Gallo, sandwich Gregg in uniform.



Gregg, Joyce, and Marie at a gala family get-together.



Jo and I with newlyweds Gregg and Brigid at their West Point wedding.



Bob and Joyce's daughter Melissa with daughter Lily and husband Scott sending their smiles North for the holidays.



Bob and Joyce's daughter Karen with husband Brian and children Brooke, Anna, and Nicholas.



Bob and Joyce share a happy moment with their grandchildren.



Jon Hobbie's visit to Cranford was celebrated with a luncheon at the Lebanese restaurant in Cranford, Old City Café. Pictured from left: Laura, Pat, Ed, Jon, Gregg, Chris, and me.



Ernie's son, my nephew Jerry, and Chris enjoy a cousinly outing in Seattle, October 2025.

Chapter 7:

My Favorites

During the inquisitive letters from my daughter these past 18 months, Meg would often ask me what my favorite this or that was. I'm not going to discuss my favorite foods now because, alas, that no longer is one of the highlights in my life. For most of my adult life, I lived to eat. Most people eat in order to live. I enjoyed so many different foods at various restaurants. I still to this day can remember each of them and where and when I devoured most of those tasty dishes. Unfortunately, a few years ago, I found that I had lost most of my sense of taste, and also my sense of smell was diminished severely. It was the result of some of the medicines I had to take after a minor heart attack in 2013. I found that I could only tolerate certain medicines, and unfortunately they were the ones that messed up these vital senses. Consequently, mealtime, which used to be the high point of my day, is now merely a necessary function I must tolerate because my body requires the nutrition.

So, let's turn to reading, one of my favorite pastimes. I like almost all genres, but am particularly attracted to European literature. French and Italian literature are superb, but Russian literature tops them all. "War and Peace" and "Dr. Zhivago" are probably the two greatest novels I've ever read. I read them in my youth, and with good luck I hope to read them again. The exciting plots and outstanding descriptions are etched in my mind as the best of the best. I could "see" and "feel" the cold weather of the vast Russian territory and understand the daunting task of trying to unify such an immense and diverse populous. The seemingly never-ending struggle to do so added to the excitement of reading these lengthy novels.

When it comes to movies, "Casablanca" rates at the top of the list. Everything about that production turned out perfectly. I have watched it many times, and never am disappointed or bored even

though I know what transpires. It was a wonderful plot, the actors are all excellent, the best song, the best humor, the best bit players. It lacks nothing. I still get tears of both joy and sadness when I watch reruns. I am a big fan of many movies, especially those directed by foreign directors like the older Italian ones. They seemed to capture human emotions more realistically than their American brethren.

I have always enjoyed attending live theater performances with the best being in New York City. I also have had annual subscriptions to the McCarter Theater in Princeton, The George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, and several local theaters in Metuchen, Westfield, and Cranford. I prefer dramas a little more than musicals, although "Chorus Line" and "The Fiddler on the Roof" are two of my all-time favorites. "Death of a Salesman" and "12 Angry Men" rank highest in serious productions. Something that always fascinated me is watching the same play directed in different theaters by different directors. It always produced widely varying results, often very entertaining in their uniqueness.

I have never enjoyed and been willing to watch any horror movies or books on the same subject.

My favorite songs over the years are, "In Dreams," by Roy Orbison, "Hey Jude," by the Beatles, and "MacArthur Park" by Richard Harris. In addition to loving the sound of a piano, I also enjoy the guitar, flute, oboe, trumpet, and sometimes saxophone. I dislike drums. They can be very, very annoying. I went through different phases as my kids were growing up, at first liking the Big Band sound and seeing Vaughan Monroe in person in Asbury Park when I was a kid. I loved to listen to Gregg and Chris play their guitars and sing the songs made popular by the artists of their era.

My favorite color has always been sky blue. When I get to choose, that's what I select. Blue for a boy? Who knows? My favorite number is 4. Whenever I could select a number for a sports uniform, I always picked 4. Mel Ott, player and then later manager of the New York Giants baseball team, was my boyhood idol and wore number 4. I wanted to be like him so much, I tried to bat left-handed like him, but

after a couple of years of poor batting I switched back to right-handed. For the record, his name was Melvin Thomas Ott. And Leo Durocher, manager of the opposition Brooklyn Dodgers, referred to him when he said, "Nice guys finish last." And Ott was a nice guy who died fairly young in a car accident. By the way, he was one of the first batters to lift up his opposite foot before he swung. He was a short guy, and it gave him that extra power to hit 512 home runs in his career. A sportswriter of that era referred to him as, "A dog lifting his leg at a fire hydrant." In my mind, it was meant as a descriptive compliment.

As a child, Wednesday was my favorite day of the week because time went by very slowly until Wednesday, and then the week was over in the blink of an eye. Later when I was raising children, weekends became my favorite because I could then do things with my family. It also enabled me to keep up with the demands of maintaining our home and property. Now, as the "geezer in residence," every day I wake up becomes my favorite day. It remains so until the next day. Case in point: Yesterday my son Chris called from Pennsylvania and asked me what I would like for my birthday. I said, "To be here."

My favorite hang-out places were as follows. While attending Lincoln Grammar School, we all gravitated to Redfield's Candy Store on Centennial Avenue, where we bought candy, baseball cards, newspapers, and such. During World War II, when troop trains with German and Italian prisoners of war were parked on the siding for hours, we often bought them cigarettes in exchange for medals of various sorts. A store that gave Redfield's only slight competition was Shikri Kiamie's Candy Story at the corner of Centennial and North Lehigh, across from the empty lot that became Cymbaluk's Gas Station. Shikri was one of the Kiamie brothers, and as a widower, lived with his son Edmund. One day, Edmund woke up to find that his father had died during the night. No more penny candy. By the way, the empty lot across the street became the Cymbaluk Gas Station, and a few years ago was replaced by a huge apartment building with a salon on the ground floor and many parking spaces. I recall when I was about 8 or 9 that same hilly, grassy empty lot hosted our marble games and

touch football. In high school, our favorite hangout was a soda/candy store in the middle of town across the street from where the Old City Lebanese restaurant is now located. There's a Greek restaurant there now. We all hung around there when it wasn't a sports season.

During sports season, Ernie and I always stopped at Jung's Bakery on Centennial Avenue for those delicious cream puffs and eclairs. That's why when Essie heated up our saved dinners, we would say, "I'm not very hungry."

The family vacations that were memorable were three of them. One was in the Poconos in the house that my father had built. I recall collecting wood on a sleigh with my three children, fending off a growling dog, and Chris, Gregg and Meg in their PJs around a blazing fireplace, trying to stay warm with just the inadequate baseboard heat. Everyone seemed to be very happy away from the rest of the world. Second was all the Shore vacations, except when worrying about the kids when they took off for the excitement of a boardwalk. I especially recall Manasquan in the house right on the beach. I used to sit on the back porch, bundled up against the cold evening, smoking a cigar and reading. The last vacation was a shore visit at the Outer Banks of North Carolina. It was exciting, spooky, and featured a very, very rough ocean. That's when we had a scary event, when an instant, powerful undertow tried to tear Meg from her mother's and my tenacious grips on her arms. We looked at each other in shock and walked out of the water with Meg, and spent the rest of the day watching all the kids like hawks. It was an enjoyable vacation, but really shook us up.

Other folks I'll never forget
Laura Jean Faller

Laura was the kid sister I never had. Our mothers were sisters and, therefore, we got to see a lot of each other throughout our lives. She grew up in Oneonta, New York.

From the time I was a child, we often vacationed together because our mothers wanted to see each other. How

many hours in our youth were spent laughing as I tried to maneuver a rowboat or canoe on one of those many lakes not too far from Homer where our grandparents, Phil and Anna Sopp, lived.

I have recollections of two happy kids whose mothers occasionally had to “shush” them because we found humor in almost everything we did, wherever it was. Part of it was because we were children of the 30s and 40s trying to blend into the protective umbrella of being American kids. On the other hand, our mothers were exposing us to the cultural differences of the Mid-Eastern world, which we often found to be hilarious.

Laura married, had two beautiful daughters, Jan and Diane (or “Dee”), and then life tossed her a few thunderbolts. Her husband left her shortly after the family relocated to Atlanta. Much later, after years of a very successful teaching career in Atlanta, she contracted an autoimmune disease which affected her mobility for the rest of her life. At that time I began visiting her in Atlanta once a year until she passed away. During those visits we always resumed those giggly, fun times, talking about relatives past and present and the issues of the day. Until the day she died, she never lost her zest for life. After her death, her younger daughter Jan was struck down and died a too-early death. Laura and I sailed our boats in a different era, and we both tried to squeeze every moment of happiness we could in the time we were given. I miss my kid sister.

Diane and Doug Dykstra

Diane, or Dee, is my cousin Laura Faller’s surviving daughter. She lives with her husband Doug in Alexandria, Virginia, and has had a long, successful corporate career. We keep in touch periodically, and I so enjoy hearing about their

lives and also to have the chance to reminisce about our beloved Laura and Jan. A few decades ago, Doug and Dee went to Japan, where he sang with the Washington, D.C. opera company in performing several operas. Having lived in Japan for several years, I fully appreciated Dee's description of that fabulous trip. Sadly she is the only living member of her grandmother Margaret's lovely family. I said my farewells when I visited Laura and Jan's gravesites in Oneonta several years ago.

Frank Thompson

My mother's younger sister Margaret married Frank Thompson from Oneonta. They were the parents of my cousin Laura Jean and a handicapped son Frankie. Uncle Frank was one of my heroes, who I admired so much. He worked very hard running his own business and I often went with him on his delivery truck all over the city to transport shipments of ice, wood, and coal. He always had a broad infectious grin on his face, and always made me feel very comfortable with him. He toiled unrelentingly and cursed his way to finishing whatever he undertook. After years and years of watching him in many of these situations, I concluded there was one thing for sure: He constantly spoke about my cousin Laura, who was the joy of his life, and of whom he was exceptionally proud. To her dying day, she returned those feelings. To her he was a knight in shining armor.

I couldn't forget my Uncle Frank's face if I tried. He was a man of various moods, and his face reflected them all. If he was adding up a customer's bill on that little notepad he always carried in his pocket, he frowned. If he was telling you an exciting story, he would be chomping on his always-present cigar and smiling ear to ear. If it was wartime, and I was in a foxhole, I would want him as the person who was with

me. He was one tough man! Whether he was hauling ice, coal, or wood, or working in his yard, he appeared confident and fearless. He was also extremely generous to his visiting nephews – I can attest to that.

In time, he and Aunt Margaret divorced, and he continued to live in their River Road home. I wince with pain when I picture him in his last days, sitting in a chair on the sidewalk in front of that home, as his face reflected a loneliness of an irretrievable era. The scene I just described occurred on one of my last visits to Oneonta while he was still alive. Although he is gone, I feel only good thoughts when I recall the days I was in his company.

Joey Hobbie

Joey is the oldest of my siblings' children. He was born while I was in Japan. And the thought of that sweet toddler being the apple of my elderly grandfather's eyes is mind-boggling. The thought that Joey is now approaching or in his 70th year is astonishing. I vividly recall that adorable toddler when I first returned from Japan, always with a smile on his face. He was sensitive to the needs of the elders who cared for and protected him.

As a young man, he married Diane Karalius. Interestingly, during his childhood, he first lived upstairs in the big apartment on 90 Winans Avenue and then next door as a neighbor, and after he married Diane for a brief period of time he lived in the 90 Winans avenue small upstairs apartment.

Years later, Joey and Diane bought a home in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, although he commuted to Franklin Township, New Jersey, where he was a middle school teacher. Occasionally, I used to run into Joey at a memorial service for a mutual loved one, and always true to his character he was friendly and respectful. I am always deeply touched that his

and Diane's Christmas card is always the first one I receive each year.

In his youth, Joey was an avid fisherman and hunter. He has unfailingly marched to a steady, reliable beat. In other words, he has always been his own man. His three youngsters Lance, Mikki, and Travis, are now young adults, and like most of our extended family, have undoubtedly moved on fulfilling their childhood dreams.

It's hard to believe that Lance and Mikki are probably in their late 30s, while Travis is in his mid-30s! Wasn't it just yesterday that they were teenagers? They may be older but I am sure that they all reflect Joey and Diane's caring, friendly, enduring values. Joey is one of my relatives that I care for very much.

Bobby and Maureen Isaf

My cousin Bob was the only child of my Aunt Rose and her husband Salem. He was in my brother Eddie's age group, and they hung out together when Eddie visited our Cortland, New York, relatives. Bob earned his doctorate and spent a career teaching at SUNY Cortland, which was convenient because it was about in his back yard. He and Maureen, his gifted wife, are parents of children living throughout the United States. Up until the pandemic, I visited Bob and Maureen once or twice a year, enjoying their company and sharing meals with them.

Maureen was extremely helpful when I put my two family books together in the early 2000s. She is very well read, and we often trade titles of books for the other to read. Bob was one of the last of my first cousins I used to visit in my later years. He passed away a few years ago, and while I still remain in contact with Maureen, I miss Bob's side-splitting quips he served up beautifully.

Manuel Garcia

A former AT&T employee, Manuel Garcia was one of three brothers who owned and operated The Spanish Tavern. He usually managed the one located on Route 22 in Mountainside, New Jersey. The main operation was in Newark in the Ironbound Section. The brothers sold the Route 22 operation a few years ago, but I don't know about the Newark location. I asked a staff member in Mountainside about Manuel recently, and was told he was well and had retired. I recall he told me several years ago that he had taken up painting and gardening. Whatever he is doing, I wish him well because he is one of the finest, kindest gentlemen I have known. He is extremely intelligent, sensitive to those around him, and has an engaging, warm personality.

Chuck Murray

Many years ago, my brother Ed and Patty took me to lunch at Ferraro's in Westfield. That was the beginning of a long history of enjoying countless meals at that premier restaurant. I've taken friends, relatives, business associates to taste their wonderful dishes. The owners and operators of that restaurant are Anna and Paul Ferraro. She wisely selected her son-in-law, Chuck Murray, husband of her daughter Lena, from nearby Cranford to be the maître d', the person in charge of the day-by-day operation in their sprawling enterprise.

Chuck embodies the perfect temperament to run such a vast, active business. He has the quick-thinking, smooth, outgoing personality to handle the large influx and turnover of patrons, kitchen staff, waitstaff, solving periodic conflicts without ruffling feathers. That's why his patrons clamor to come back again. Great food, wonderful service, and a most pleasant atmosphere! As the years have rolled by, the Ferraro

parents have taken a back seat in their business, allowing their family to run the day-to-day operations.

It has been many years since the parents did the heavy lifting, growing from a small, delicious pizza parlor to a top-notch dining experience. In my mind, from the very beginning, Anna Ferraro was the glue in that magnificent family of delicious food providers. She and her children have provided Westfield with countless de-cades of exceptional Italian cuisine. Thanks to son-in-law Chuck Murray and members of his growing family, that tradition has been carried on for decades.

That's why I constantly take or send my own expanding family to Ferraro's to celebrate any occasion worthy of first-class dining.

The Steve Diamandas Family

For over 75 years, beginning first in Newark, New Jersey, the Diamandas family has owned and operated The Greek Store. Originally called Liberty Food by grandfather Nicholas, the amiable, friendly Steve and his wife Vasi moved it to Kenilworth, acceded to the many customers' requests to call it The Greek Store, and officially changed its name. My good friend Steve passed away a few years ago. I miss my enjoyable discussions with him whenever I visited the store to stock up on my favorites.

From a culinary point of view, daughter Lia, who runs the daily operations, has expanded the choice of attractive and delicious dishes. On a recent visit, reading many of the labeled meals in the freezer section, I became aware that Vasi's name appears on many of the entrees. Even though I don't see her there often any more, it's wonderful that her spirit and cuisine are a vital part of the store's excellence and authenticity through her traditional family recipes.

It's always nice to see Lia's smiling, welcoming face. I have watched her over the years, not only grow up as a lovely person, but also to watch her broaden her managerial skills. She has combined her father's warm demeanor and business acumen and her mother's gentle presence into a most talented woman.

I can still see the look on Steve's face whenever he spoke of her. He was one proud dad!

Bob Bozzomo

One of the greatest pleasures of the first 20 years of the 21st century was having lunch with three exceptional friends...Frank Mertz, Bill Donohue, and Bob Bozzomo. I had known Frank and Bill for decades, but only met Bob in recent years. Frank brought Bob into the group, which made it a foursome, and brought more AT&T background into our discussion. We met every two months at a different restaurant, with the host selecting the eatery and making the necessary arrangements.

Bob is a retired AT&T executive, who had worked in New York City. Like me, he then pursued a new career and became a counselor. It was fascinating to hear about the requirements and activities of his new rewarding career.

One of the things that stimulated our luncheon dialogue were the give-and-take opinions Bob had on most subjects. It was such fun to delve into contrary opinions, sometimes laughingly, sometimes intensely. We all were involved and could hardly wait our turn to express what we thought! I truly miss those happy, fulfilling luncheons with Bob, Bill, and Frank. I always left enriched by their perspectives that often added immensely to my data base of knowledge.

Carla and George Strom

I first met Carla when Patty Castaldo (now Hobbie), then about 12 years old, brought her two younger sisters, Carla and Cookie, to the playground summer program I was running. They were very well-mannered, well-groomed and well-dressed little girls. Decades later, Patty shared that her mother always insisted they be perfectly coifed whenever they went out.

Carla and her husband George later came into my orbit at the time Jo and I lived in Fanwood, New Jersey, in our first home and we visited the Stroms in their house in Scotch Plains. George and I became teammates in adult softball and basketball leagues. The tall, soft-spoken George was a well-respected player who always let his actions speak for him, and we were all saddened by his passing at the age of 72 in Florida. Carla was always fun to be with. She currently lives in Florida, where she is very active. Each year I look forward to the Christmas card, which contained detailed letters of her travels and numerous activities during the year with her family and friends. Carla has battled some health issues recently. My understanding is that this courageous, caring person has completely recuperated. She recently spent time with her daughter Karen in Canada before returning to her Florida home.

Helen Pollard

Helen Josphe was one of those numerous Cortland cousins I didn't learn about until very late in my life. She grew up next door to my Uncle Fred Isaf's Lehigh Hotel, but left Cortland to work in Washington, D.C., during World War II. She married a person named Pollard, and after the war, moved with him to Tennessee to spend her adult life there.

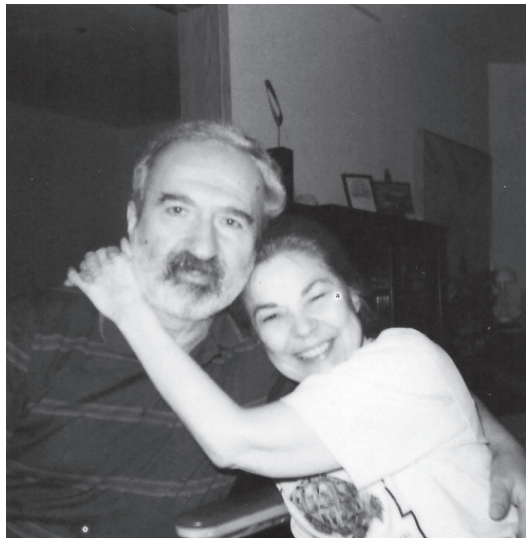
We met at a family reunion in the early 2000s, and had stayed in touch ever since. Many of our discussions were about our relatives in the Cortland area.

I was always impressed by Helen's enjoyment of life. She lived to be over 100, and was always upbeat on our phone calls. She never lost her enthusiasm for discussing the extended family, present or past.



A happy family get-together with Meg and Donnie in Florida, from left: Chris, Elizabeth, Ed, Meg, Donnie, Christopher.

With my late "kid sister,"
Laura Jean Faller.



Chapter 8:

Close Calls, Scares, and Such

When you've lived for 94 years, you're certain to have a few close calls here and there, and some scary or very strange events occur in your life. My first traumatic event was the death of my 9-year-old brother in 1936. He'd died of rheumatic fever, and neither Ernie nor I remembered what he looked like or sounded like. I have no memory of him when I look at still photographs. Interestingly, I vividly remember all the events associated with that tragedy. I remember the details of the wake in our home, the conversations among my father, mother, and parish minister, the chairs brought in by the funeral home, the crying and somber air that pervaded the household for weeks and weeks afterwards. It undoubtedly was the reason I feared death until my 30's. My father died in 1969, and it was a blow. I felt life would never be the same, and it never was, but I learned life goes on, no matter how great your loss. Losing Essie, my mother, was a too-soon event, but eventually I adjusted to it. Thankfully, the memories are plentiful and unremovable. My parents and grandparents left us with so many wonderful memories that I have always felt the love and warmth of those dear people wherever I have been in life.

I had several near-death experiences in high school. Two of them occurred while I was in a classmate's huge Town and Country Chrysler car. A bunch of us were riding with him in the Watchung Mountains, laughing and not a care in the world. All of a sudden, we were speeding down a narrow road, leading to Route 22. He couldn't stop the car because of the icy conditions, and we began sliding onto Route 22. If cars had been speeding by as they usually did, there would have been a horrific accident. But lucky for us, the stop lights were in our favor, and had stopped a long line of cars just to our left. We kept laughing because, at that age, you felt you were invincible. The other time, we were on a triple date, and I was in the back seat,

sitting between my friends' dates. We were speeding down Route 22, approaching North Plainfield when the traffic light next to the football stadium turned red. Our driver tried to stop, and we all prepared for an impending crash, but he stopped a foot behind the car in front of us, and we all relaxed. That's when the pickup truck pulling a horse in its van smashed into us from behind. It drilled us into the car ahead of us in a series of bumps. When the figurative smoke cleared, the front and back of our car were crushed like an accordion, but the passenger seats were not. His parents drove from Cranford to pick us up, and take us to their huge mansion, where we drank hot chocolate. Then the father, who looked a little like the actor Sidney Greenstreet, had us sign release forms saying we wouldn't sue them. His wife had been drinking, and laughed all the time we were there. That probably was the beginning of my chronic neck problems, which began the next day...and have kept me company for the next 75 years.

The next near-death experiences were in airplanes. In 1955, I was in a single-engine two-open-seat airplane piloted by an Air Force Captain. He lived with his wife and young son in Camp Bofu, but worked elsewhere. We flew up to the large naval base at Iwakuni in Yamaguchi to buy Christmas presents at the large Ship's Store (PX). Upon completion of the shopping, we learned that we couldn't leave because we were fogged in. We were 45 minutes by plane away from Bofu, but it appeared that we had to spend the night away from our homes. The pilot told me to climb into my seat (wearing an old, tattered Japanese parachute), and he raced back to the control tower to beg for permission to leave. While it was somewhat foggy, he came running back saying, "We got an OK to go, but if we don't go quickly, we will shut down with the rest of the flights." We were so happy as we taxied down the foggy runway and took off, knowing we had to climb over several mountains (Yamaguchi means mountainous).

Unfortunately, after a brief time, the engine began sputtering, and I prepared myself for big trouble. I was seated in the back seat, and the pilot in the front, both of us in an open cockpit. We continued to fly low, the sputtering intensified. Finally, he shouted back to

me (that's how we talked to each other; there were no phones). He said, "It's getting pretty bad. If I tell you to bail out, jump." At the thought of my first jump from a plane, flying fairly low and wearing this old, tattered Japanese parachute, I made an instant decision. I yelled back, "Bruce, I'll jump when you jump!" Happily, I can report that we limped back to Bofu and safely landed with all the Christmas presents safely stored in the side compartment...and then I began breathing again.

The next scare came in 1972, when we were living in Greensboro. I was flying back from a meeting somewhere, and as we approached Greensboro, the pilot said, "The weather's bad in Greensboro, and we may have to land in Raleigh, and bus you back to Greensboro." We all began to grumble about the extra time, the inconvenience, etc., and hoped we would get lucky and land in Greensboro. I knew my family would be waiting for me because I had given Jo the ETA. Well, we tried several times to land, but each time the pilot was uncomfortable and would take it back up and circle before trying again. The last time we tried, I was shocked to see the upside-down landscape from my window seat, and was sure we were going to crash. Then a funny thing began to happen. All of us passengers who had grumbled about having to land in Raleigh began complaining, "What's the matter with the pilot? Why doesn't he take us to Raleigh instead of risking our lives?" We were all so relieved when he finally said, "We're going to have to go to Raleigh." Everyone burst out in applause. By the way, my 12-year-old son Gregg went into the airport to check on my flight number status, and he asked if it had landed. The desk attendant said, "He's trying to!" I know it was a long time ago, so the then-12-year-old Gregg may not remember it. I know I'll never forget it.

I had a minor scary experience when I was 9 or 10 walking home from church choir practice with my brother Ernie. The Fricke house on Centennial Avenue was set far back from the road and was framed by big willow trees, which were always swaying in the wind. It was very spooky looking, and we were sure all the evil spirits lived there. That dark evening, as we carefully walked past it, Ernie began telling

me that he saw something moving towards us and began running, urging me to follow suit. I was terrified, began chasing him, and yelling, "Wait for me! Wait for me!" He finally stopped and was laughing when I caught up to him. He got what he wanted: a scared kid brother. As I drive by there now, I can't see anything that is in the least bit scary. Imagination and youth are a powerful combination.

In 1952, when I was attending Davis & Elkins College, I lived in an old Army barracks in a small room with a cot for a bed. I had to walk up a hill to go to the building where the cafeterias, our classes, and the administration were located. The students on scholarship, basketball for me, lived in those old Army barracks while the tuition-paying students got to live in the dormitories on upper campus. It so happened that the entire campus was home to dozens of dogs, who roamed around endlessly. From probably inbreeding they were the strangest-looking dogs I've ever seen. Some had large bodies and tiny, little heads, or just the opposite. Only a few looked normal. One cold winter day (Elkins got a lot of ice and snow in the winter), I had overslept and realized I had to "boogie" to get to class on time. I jumped into my personal uniform (dungarees, sweat shirt, sweat sock and loafers) and still half asleep bolted out of my room and ran towards the nearest exit. After going through the door, I crossed a short porch and began to step down on the grass. As I looked down, there was a grotesque-looking frozen dog that I was about to step on. I screamed and somehow used my other foot to propel me just beyond the body of the dead dog, and without looking back ran up the hill to my first class. That I didn't drop my bookbag was a miracle.

Another scare happened in the same barracks during the warmer weather. For whatever reason, I was napping on my cot late in the afternoon when I was awakened by a purring cat sitting on my chest staring down into my eyes. I screamed, swatted the cat off me, and it ran out of the room through the open door it had entered earlier. I went up and down the corridors looking in every room to find the jerk who had left one of the outside doors open. No one fessed up, and I made signs and posted them on every outside door.

Another time at Davis & Elkins, I was driving my roommate's car on those icy West Virginia mountain roads during the winter. It was uncanny how things turned out. My roommate was younger than I and liked to drink. He also owned one of the few cars on campus. Whenever we were out partying with our classmates, he was smart enough to know he couldn't drink and drive. I had transferred from a 2-year college, and got all of my drinking out of my system and was almost always sober. Therefore, he always entrusted the driving home from a party to me. It was not easy because everyone else in his overcrowded car would try to reach over the back seat and my shoulders to "help" me drive the car. At the edge of all those mountainous roads were precipices that would have destroyed the car and its passengers had we slid over them. Unbelievably, as we skidded toward the edge and possibly our doom, I would be turning the wheel as fast as I could but with very little traction from those icy roads. At the last second, the car would react favorably by turning away from the edge. That happened again and again. You can appreciate the screaming from the passengers in the car as they watched the scene play out. My problem was trying to spin the wheel while several arms were clawing away over my shoulders trying to help me. Fortunately, my roommate was tall, strong, and powerful. I told him that if he didn't eliminate all of the interference, I would no longer drive the car. He calmed the scene by loudly declaring that he would clobber the next person who tried to interfere with my driving. For that night, there would be no further incidents.

Another time those Elkins mountains nearly did me in was when the local girl I was dating asked her brother to drive us to an event. He was quite the daredevil, and received great pleasure watching my face in the backseat through the rear-view mirror as he drove 90 miles an hour on those dangerous, winding, mountain roads. Although I tried very hard to maintain a confident look sitting next to my date in the backseat, I was absolutely terrified the entire way!

The worst place I ever worked, which no doubt would have led to an early death, was an industrial plant in Linden, New Jersey. It

was located on Route 1, the main highway. I was 17, and got the job to earn some spending money. It was a huge, dirty, noisy building, and I worked alongside 5 or 6 older men, stirring some kind of oily mixture in a very large cauldron. Smoke and fumes kept bellowing out, and you could barely see the other workers. I have no memory of the purpose of our work, but it was almost noontime, for which I was grateful. As I was leaning over that foul-smelling tub of liquid stirring away, a hand tapped me on the shoulder. An elderly African American worker motioned me to follow him, which I did. I was kind of woozy from the fumes, and he steadied me with his arm. In a very kind, compassionate voice he said, "Son. You don't want to work in this kind of a job. We have to." Looking into his eyes, I saw that he was being very caring and sincere as he spoke to me. I also realized it took all I had to stick with that paddle because I wanted to succeed. I thanked him, found the boss, and told him I wouldn't be coming back after lunch because the job was not for me. He was most understanding and told me, "I owe you a half day wages." I responded, "No you don't. Sorry for the inconvenience." And I left, thrilled that it was behind me. I never wanted to go back there again...ever!

Other folks I'll never forget
Jimmy Yaman

In my previous books, I devoted many pages to the many contributions of JimmyYaman, an extraordinary man who built a thriving real estate business in Cortland County after he returned from World War II. He helped his community and many individuals in it for decades, and funded Yaman Park, which opened in 1967, as a lasting tribute to his father for "the families and children of the City of Cortland." He had donated land and large sums of money to ensure that this man-made swimming area and park could be enjoyed for decades.

Jimmy also provided financial assistance to help several people in need of operations. Whenever I commended him

for his benevolent actions, he would shrug his shoulders and say, "It's only money."

I made that 220 mile trip from New Jersey to Cortland often, sight-seeing, reminiscing, and savoring delicious meals with Jimmy in the Cortland County area. We had tons of laughs, swapping stories about an era when I would visit Homer as a boy and listen to Jimmy's father Joe discussing world issues with my grandfather, Giddo Tommy, while the latter was repairing people's wornout footwear. Jim's very successful real estate agency is now run by his grandson Jamie. One of Jimmy's sons, David, is also prominent in real estate in the area. Jimmy passed on at the age of 96, leaving the city of Cortland in far better shape than when he entered it.

I miss listening to his constant quest for new information and his overwhelming drive to solve any problem that required fixing. His warmth, affection, trust and friendship touched me deeply and was reciprocated.

I doubt that his unique style will ever be duplicated!

Dottie Kelly

A side benefit to visiting Jimmy Yaman in Cortland was meeting Dottie Kelly, a now-retired schoolteacher who was his dear friend. It meant seeing her as often as I saw Jimmy. In fact, she did the driving when we went to lakes, restaurants, apple orchards and such.

Dottie is exceptionally intelligent, and offered interesting information during our lengthy, fun times together. I enjoyed hearing stories of her family and their activities scattered throughout the United States. I recall one fascinating story where Dottie visited China with one of her grandsons. She leads a very active life, travels often, and continues to contribute her wisdom and guidance to the children of Cortland.

Fred Isaf

To my young eyes, the husband of my mother's cousin Saleamie, Fred Isaf, seemed like a giant. Besides being a powerful, over 6' tall and large-framed, his persona carried such a figure of authority that it made him appear gigantic at times. Wherever he congregated with others, there was no question he ruled. His body language often echoed his strong voice that made it easy to always believe him. I recall seeing him slam the bar or table to accentuate the point he was making. The Lehigh Hotel was so much his workplace and "play-ground" that years later, when I heard that he had sold it and purchased a liquor store, I couldn't imagine that bar without him at the helm. How could anyone else control those thirsty workers who descended upon his establishment each day as their work shift ended?

I truly loved that man. Whatever the circumstances were, even at stressful times, he always treated me kindly, caringly, and with warmth.

Saleamie Isaf

Aunt Saleamie, Uncle Fred's slender, energetic wife, was the backbone of the Fred Isaf clan. She was smart, resourceful, well-organized, and a very determined woman. I recall her sons boasting about her feats of strength in opening some stubborn kegs of beer. And one harassed member of her family was saved when an assailant was stopped in his tracks by Saleamie's quick action grabbing him and pulling him away.

Yet she always had an endearing smile to those guests she welcomed into her beautiful, large home on Groton Avenue. In addition to being the overseer of the smooth-running Lehigh Hotel bar/restaurant, she effectively managed that

home that always seemed filled with many guests and their large appetites.

To my young eyes of the 1930s and '40s, it appeared that, although Uncle Fred's booming voice and strong physical presence reigned over the barroom, Aunt Saleamie was in charge of that large, busy kitchen, the dining area, and made sure all deliveries were on time and fully satisfied. She kept the place humming. Later, after Uncle Fred passed away, she ran the liquor store by herself, making sure that it was able to respond to the needs of Cortland and the close-by towns.

Aunt Saleamie, daughter of Merod Joseph, who was the older brother of my grandmother Anna Joseph Sopp, was truly an exceptional person and, like her husband, I loved her very much.

Assad (Ace) Isaf

It seems like ages ago...and it was...that Ace was holding court for his young cousin vacationing in Upstate New York. He was a few years older, but it seemed much more. I don't know if he was "assigned" to look out for his young cousin, or just that we naturally got along so well.

There wasn't a movie at the three Cortland theaters that we missed; they changed twice a week. I spent so much time in the movies that I had difficulty adjusting my vision when we finally emerged into the daylight. I like to think that Ace actually enjoyed teaching his young cousin about the world because I paid close attention to all his directions, and found all his humor worthy of laughter.

Sometimes we left the security of that backroom kitchen with all its enticements of hot dogs, rolls, onions, a nearby case with every ice-cold soda bottle of the era floating among large chunks of ice. We explored every nook and cranny around that building called The Lehigh Hotel.

At the end of the summer, I would return to the world of Cranford, New Jersey, with its demands of helping to tend to the large yard and garden. Oh yes. There was also something called school, sports, and newly acquired friendships.

Somewhere along the line, my hectic New Jersey schedule would be interrupted by the news of another dear relative from Homer, Cortland or Oneonta having passed away. In some cases, we stopped the merry-go-round and raced to the funeral to pay our respects. Unfortunately, someone neglected to inform me of Ace's sudden passing at age 63, and I deeply regretted not being able to attend the services.

He is still sorely missed: My mentor, my friend, my cousin.

Tom Isaf

Tom and I went full circle in our relationship. He was about 9 years older than me and had served as an officer in the Marine Corps. Much was written about and from Tom in my second book, "Other Voices." What I didn't include was the fact that I respected Tom, but also feared him when I was a youngster. I now understand why Tom felt the way he did about me. This skinny kid from New Jersey was always underfoot, pigging out on hot dogs, soft drinks and such at a gluttonous pace. But worst of all, was the unwelcome surprise his mother had sprung on him.

What I didn't know was that The Lehigh Hotel had upstairs sleeping quarters over the bar, and that Tom had his own room. Well, late one evening, when this 11-year-old was tired from playing all day, Saleamie kindly took my exhausted body and put me in an empty bed, which unknowing to me belonged to Tom. I was awakened in the wee hours of the morning when the very tired Tom fell into his "empty" bed and found me sprawled, asleep in it.

What followed was one of the longest nights of my brief life as I lay awake being alternately pushed, nudged, shoved, and cursed at until I ended up on the far corner of the bed with one foot on the ground to keep me from being completely ousted from the bed. Probably 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, my body could no longer cling to my tiny space, and I was prodded from the bed into a very cold room. Having no idea where exactly the bedroom was situated relative to the rest of that huge second floor, no idea about what time it was, fearing the rescue forces would never show up, I got dressed, sat down on the cold floor with my back to the wall nearest the door to the room.

An eternity or two later, I heard noise in the hallway, and I went out to find Aunt Saleamie beginning her rounds. She asked how I had slept. I replied, "Fine, thank you, Auntie." And that was the last ever discussed about the longest night of my life.

Years later, I related that story to his sister Yvonne explaining my reluctance to contact Tom about questions for the book I was writing. She told me that he was a "sweet guy," and I should forgive him all these decades later. I agreed, she was right, and Tom and I became close adult cousins.

Unfortunately Tom's health was failing and he asked if I would do him the favor of including some of the information he had gathered for a book into what I was writing. I agreed, and included a large portion of his work into my second book, "Other Voices," making sure the reader knew it was his material. I felt good that although he was unable to attend our 2005 reunion in Cortland, that I was able to call him on my cell phone and then give my phone to our cousins Violet Nauseef, Suad Joseph, and other relatives who enjoyed long conversations with him.

That was the last time most of us had an opportunity to talk with Tom. My main regret is that I did not reengage with Tom much earlier in my life.

Yvonne Isaf Lawless

Early in this cavalcade of vignettes, I told you I would come at each story in a different way. I wasn't going to constrict myself by having to adhere to a consistent style or procedure. Part of that was because of who that person was and how much new, different information I had obtained. Yvonne Isaf Lawless is a perfect example.

I knew Yvonne at different stages of our lives, and we went from being close cousins to busy middle-aged adults engaged with our own families. I'm stunned by the number of times that I wanted to write that he or she is the last of their family. What I mean by that is that the person represented the last of the family that I grew up with, was aware of, or was a part of my world. I realize there are some relatives that I've never met, or maybe briefly at a funeral or wake. They weren't the ones who romped in a playground, went to a family picnic, sat down across the table and broke bread with me as we laughed and played. Yvonne was the last and the baby of the Uncle Fred/ Aunt Saleamie family I loved so much.

Yesterday, or so it seems, she was following me while I was following her brother Ace. He was our leader and mentor, and we were in the kitchen area of the large Lehigh Hotel in Cortland. I spent more time eating there, playing, and listening to Ace's tutorials on life during those long, hot summers away from my father, paternal grandparents and siblings. Ace, Yvonne, and I explored, investigated, laughed, saw a lot of movies, played the jukebox in the dining area, and the pinball machine in the barroom. The building was located at the end of Main Street, just a stone's throw away from the sprawling Wickwire Factory where they wove wire. Whenever the shift changed at the factory, the conveniently located bar was filled with thirsty workers who fascinated me with their ability to drain those large, foam-covered

schooners of beer so quickly. They quenched their thirst, and then some.

In our middle ages, we saw or heard very little from one another because we both had other fish to fry. But in the past few decades, Yvonne and I stayed in touch with occasional telephone calls. We would always spend a few minutes laughing and reminiscing about our childhood in that magical period of the '30s and '40s, swapping stories about the people we cared for and the era that passed with them. She spent the latter part of her life living with the apple of her eye, her bright, caring daughter Beth Lawless in the state of Washington. Beth kindly sent me the beautiful pamphlet which chronicled the burial service at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Covington, Washington. I opened the mail, and was struck by the smiling face of my cousin Yvonne. That was followed by the realization she now resembled her older sister Helen Hobbib. My mind's eye continued to see the faces of her brothers Tom and Ace, and then I realized the four Isaf children strongly resembled their mother Saleamie. I never saw that connection until now, when it was very, very vivid.

Bill Bennis

Bill was somebody who was a friend to my older brothers, and I became a tag-along. He was a kind, nice person from the day I met him. He was fair, honest, and was the kind of person I'd want my daughter to marry. (Fortunately, she married someone just as nice as Bill.)

As in so many cases, when your friend was primarily the lone contact with you and your family, so goes the relationship. I vividly recall the basketball games Bill excelled in, the tons of White Castles I devoured sitting way in the back of his huge car, filled with Ernie and other youngsters, and I

especially remember how my parents and grandparents were exceptionally fond of him.

During my retirement years, when I would take constitutional walks around my block, I would run into Bill, who lived several blocks away, and we would take time to chat and catch up. The last I recall hearing about him was his son Bo ran a garden nursery in the Oneonta, New York area, and I have no idea about his daughters or their families.

But I do remember that Bill stood tall when it came to character and reliability. I always looked to him as someone who was well deserving of the respect he was shown.

Salem Isaf

Again, see “Other Voices” to find out more about the complex connection of the Isaf family, how the name Isaf became part of that large and impressive family. My mother’s youngest sister Rose married handsome Salem Isaf, who always intrigued me because he was the first family member who spoke the language of my ancestors with a strong Southern accent. I found it riveting and pleasing to hear those words that I understood being spoken with such a strong Southern inflection. It was fascinating!

In addition, Uncle Salem spoke softly, caringly, and politely. He certainly fit the definition of the stereotype Southern gentleman. He owned the Cortland Paper Company, selling paper products throughout the county. He and my Aunt Rose had a son Bobby, whom I wrote about a few pages ago. Bobby worshipped my Uncle Salem, and he and his wife Maureen were my social friends over the past couple of decades. Unfortunately, as I wrote earlier, we lost Bobby a few years ago and sorely miss his jovial manner. I recall his admiring face when he related many stories about the characteristics of his wonderful dad. For example, Bobby explained

in detail about the time he uncharacteristically scored one of the two highest grades in a high school test, and the principal made him take it over again because they didn't believe he was capable of that feat. When he told his father about what had happened, Uncle Salem went into the school and demanded the other student who tested high also be required to be tested again. Which he was.

Uncle Salem was a straight shooter in everything he did.

Tom Kiamie

Toufik Kiamie was one of the elders I respected greatly. Growing up on Winans Avenue in the 1930s was an exciting, bewildering experience. The elders ruled! Many were Lebanese immigrants, but there were a few Italians, Germans, and "Americans" mixed among the group. Uncle Toufik was one of several brothers whom I admired greatly. He, his wife and three daughters lived over their brother Shikri's candy store just across the main street of Centennial Avenue. Uncle Toufik was a gentleman's gentleman. He always spoke softly and not once in my life did I ever hear him raise his voice in anger.

Whenever I met him on the street, he always had a smile on his face, and he stopped to share his mild disposition with an inquiry as to how I was doing...regardless of my age at the time. I can't recall him in other than a suit and necktie, always professional looking. My father told me that he had been a schoolteacher in Lebanon. I believe he worked as a clothes salesman, but not sure where. He and his wife Sophie and their lovely daughters have all passed away in the ensuing decades.

Charles Abdallah

Uncle Charlie Abdallah was one of the early arrivals from Lebanon. His father, Joseph Abdallah came to America in 1898. It took him 10 years to save enough money to bring his wife Mary and their children to Solon, where they lived on Syrian Hill. Uncle Charlie left school at 15 and started his career, first at Wickwires, the huge plant that built the city of Cortland. Later, he established a small milk route, which he built into one of the largest dairies in Cortland County. He had married Saleamie, a sister of my grandfather Phil Sopp, and raised a large family. Some of his children worked with their father to help establish the success of the business. Uncle Charlie bought considerable land as his business flourished, eventually selling SUNY Cortland 40 acres for its expansion.

I especially was fond of Uncle Charlie because his mannerisms were much like my father's: intelligent, soft-spoken, a leader, confident, fair, and friendly. I had the utmost respect for him, and always listened carefully whenever he spoke.

As time has passed by, we have lost most of the members of that wonderful family I knew, but perhaps one or two of his youngest daughters are still alive. As a result of the pandemic, and my aging years, I no longer make that 220 mile trip to one of the playgrounds of my youth. My primary focus is on my personal growing family, relegating myself to my home area and its beautiful change of seasons.

Selma Sopp Calale

Very few of my descendants will have heard of my mother's Aunt Selma Calale. She was one of the younger sisters of my grandfather Giddo Tommy. She was married to Holley Calale, who had a chicken and egg farm in Homer, New York. As a youngster, it was one of my favorite places to visit.

Aunt Selma always made me feel at home, like I belonged. Being 220 miles away from home for a youngster sometimes for an entire summer was difficult for this needy kid. Aunt Selma filled that vacancy because it was always a welcoming smile and a tender hug to go with it. She also excelled at making stuffed squash and salad, which were two of my favorites.

She and Holley had five children. Harry was the eldest, and served effectively as Homer's mayor for 20 years. However, it was Richard who liked sports as I did who I spent most of my time with. Most of his home duties involved the farm, and he patiently explained his work to his young New Jersey cousin. When we were older, Aunt Selma and her family moved across a major highway in Homer and further away from the center of Homer, where I lived. Afterwards, long trips to their new home were less frequent. In my later areas, after Aunt Selma had passed away, my occasional visits to Upstate New York always included visits with Harry and Richard and their wives Marian and Ginny. We shared wonderful meals and long conversations about the past and the present. Unfortunately they have passed away.

Anne Monser Gellert

I still mourn the loss of Ann Monser Gellert, an Oneonta-born cousin who was my last link to my beloved Monser family of River Street. They had a strong tie to my parents and Hobbie grandparents, who had spent many years in that Upstate New York community known as a railroad town.

I never found out just how we were related, but I know that Ann's father Illius lived with my grandparents in the Beehive for a while when he first arrived in Oneonta around 1904. The fact that my grandmother darned his socks implies some type of closeness.

As youngsters visiting Oneonta in the 1930s and '40s, we always stayed with either the Monsers or directly across the street at my mother's sister Margaret's house. Uncle Illius and his wife Marion had four daughters: Violet, Ruth, Martha, and Anne. I mentioned many of their numerous accomplishments in my previous two books.

In our later years, Anne and I became very close. The last few years of her life she hosted the most delicious meals in her Park Avenue New York City apartment. How I remember Anne and my close friend Jane sitting in that comfortable living room munching on snacks before dinner, talking about our families, the issues of the day, and just about every topic facing the world of the 21st century. Occasionally, she provided brief snippets of my family's history in Oneonta, stories that often answered questions that had plagued me most of my life.

Anne always provided her refreshingly unique perspective on issues. On our return drive to New Jersey, Jane and I digested and mulled over those wonderful insights. She is terribly missed.

Dr. Suad Joseph

When I discovered the vast number of relatives on my Grandmother Sopp's side of the family, I had no idea of the goldmine it contained. Each of those newly discovered cousins was an exceptional human being. I must confess, though, I had no idea my somewhat retired professor cousin Dr. Suad Joseph who taught at the University of California, Davis, can be characterized as being retired. In speaking with her recently I learned she continues traveling abroad and working on many projects she has spearheaded across the Middle East. She has sent me several editions of her in-depth research work and I must confess it is not casual reading. Each book

could serve as a textbook for a course on its subject matter. I tip my hat to my brilliant cousin and feel elated that my descendants might be fortunate to receive some rewards from that gifted gene pool.

Suad and I occasionally exchange correspondence and talk on the phone to stay abreast of family news. I thoroughly enjoy the friendship and the family relationship.

Sam Nader

The Naders are one of those few Lebanese families whose relationship with my family began in the early 1900s and has endured for well over a century. One of the central figures was Sam Nader, a man of many interests and talents. There was the executive officer Sam Nader, who worked over 40 years at Bendix Aviation, retiring as Director of Purchasing. Then there was Sam Nader, the mayor of Oneonta for a number of years. There was also Sam Nader the public address announcer for the Oneonta Red Sox of the Canadian-American League, and he also served as a member of its Board of Directors. In later years, Sam also became the majority owner of the Detroit Tigers farm team that played in that first-class stadium built in the city of Oneonta.

One of my highlights of visiting Sam in Oneonta was to tour his magnificent baseball museum located throughout his cellar, which featured an inexhaustible collection of baseball memorabilia about some of the most famous players, later to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, whoever laced on spiked shoes. His countless stories about some of those players in their youth are unforgettable. Several went on to become managers in the major leagues.

A few years ago, my daughter-in-law Marie Vaughan Hobbie and her husband my son Chris drove to Oneonta, where Sam graciously provided them with a tour through his

private collection of memorabilia. Many of the youngsters eventually went on to play for the Boston Red Sox in the major leagues. To fully appreciate their excitement during that visit you needed to know that Marie is a Boston College graduate, is the biggest Red Sox fan I ever met...and knows all the history about that team. Actually it involved any sports team representing her New England birthplace. But hold that story for another day because I'd have to purchase a paper factory to write everything about all her favorite New England teams.

Back to Sam Nader, if my memory serves me accurately, Sam was over 100 years old when he passed away several years ago. People came from near and far to pay their respects to "Mr. Oneonta," a legendary figure.

From my earliest memories as a little boy, I recall his parents and siblings and the most important thing about Sam is that he was kind, warm, and caring any time I met him. I admired him greatly. Sam Nader was truly one of the most memorable Lebanese men of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

John Nader

John Nader is Sam's son, who I have been in touch with lately because of his enthusiasm in researching a book focused on the Lebanese in the Oneonta area. John is one of Sam Nader's three children, and has his own very busy career. At one point he was the Dean of Arts and Sciences at SUNY Delhi. Later he served as President of SUNY Farmingdale College on Long Island, New York.

More recently he retired from that position, and has been in the process of researching and writing a wonderful book about the Lebanese migrants in early Oneonta. I have had the privilege of reviewing portions of the draft and am very impressed with his presentation of the interesting material he

has uncovered. Some of that has included some new-found information about my family in Oneonta. He and his wife Kathy have been very gracious in all our correspondence about my family and the rest of his book.

I hope I'm fortunate enough to be here when he completes and publishes this must-read book. I would be most surprised if the book does not become a key document for those interested in the history of the Lebanese who settled in that area. You'll also learn about the vital role that several railroad lines played in populating this part of New York State.

Margaret Thompson Black

Aunt Margaret, one of my mother's younger sisters, was a many-storied woman. She had eloped with my Uncle Frank Thompson at a young age. Hers was a very fiery marriage, always giving back as much as she was getting. She was a very beautiful woman, and I recall a co-worker saying to me after I published my first book that my mother and her sisters Nettie and Margaret on page 191 were something. She said that Aunt Margaret in the middle was stunningly beautiful. In looking at that photograph now I must agree, even though because she was my loving Aunt, I never saw her that way through our long lives.

She cared for me, always looked out for my welfare, and whenever I visited her home in Oneonta made me feel part of the family. In fact, because her daughter Laura was my best friend most of my life, she treated us both as her children, always protective, encouraging, and with great love.

As I wrote in the previous books, she divorced and later married Russ Black, a soft-spoken, wonderful man who returned her love for him manyfold. Late in her life, after Russ had passed away, she lived in Cortland in a multi-storied, large senior citizen residence. I often visited her there, and

saw how active she was as a dynamic leader. She spearheaded efforts to make available thousands of meals in the Cortland County's Nutrition Program.

She was 90 years old when she passed away in late 2001. Without a doubt, Aunt Margaret left a lasting impression of a beautiful, strong, feisty, fun, and loving aunt.

Laurice Darweesh Burke

The multi-talented Laurice lives outside Binghamton, New York, in a senior community called Endwell. There she has kept busy in her widowed life painting, sculpting, writing, and keeping in touch with her three sons, who live in distant parts of the United States.

When she lived in Spring Lake, New Jersey, years ago, I used to visit her and her late husband Joe in their beautiful home not far from the beach. That picturesque sea resort is still my favorite beach retreat, except my trips there are much less frequent.

Laurice was born in Oneonta in the early 1930s, but her family moved to Cortland where she, her older sister and younger brother all excelled in the Cortland school system, winning several competitive honors.

Like my own family, Laurice and her entire family worked the land and grew just about every vegetable that was edible or that could be preserved for canning. I must tell you that while growing up I cannot remember a tastier morsel than fresh garden vegetables picked and eaten.

Laurice's family had a summer home in Nibeh, and from stories we heard our grandparents knew one another there back in 1875. When I wrote the two family books in the early 2000s, Jimmy Yaman facilitated our meeting each other through the telephone. It was a fortunate meeting because she was able to provide me with a lot of information about

Lebanese families and relationships that clarified events I was writing about.

Joe and Laurice lived in Cortland for almost two decades where they taught school. They then lived in Spring Lake for a shorter period, and moved into an attractive home in Endwell, where after a number of years Joe passed away. For many years they were avid and active travelers on ocean cruises, and went by ship all over the world.

At one of our reunions decades ago, Laurice gifted me with a portrait of my parents she had painted from a photograph. It has been on my dining room wall proudly presiding over the house they constructed nearly one hundred years ago.

We stay in touch periodically by phone. We chat about our families and the many friends and families who no longer reside on this earth. Laurice is bright, energetic, talented and very warm, and she and Joe are a wonderful part of my memory bank.

Violet Joseph Nauseef

At our second reunion in Cortland in 2005, I finally got to meet many members of my Grandmother Anna Joseph Sopp's family. It was truly a shocker because we recently learned that there were as many as 16 siblings in her family and I had always thought of my Sitto Tommy as an only child.

Among the many dear cousins I learned about, I was instantly drawn to Violet Nauseef. Her attractive, intelligent demeanor was overwhelming, and John, her husband is a retired Air Force general. Like Violet, John also has a magnetic personality. We have agreed that had we lived near one another growing up, we would all be best friends.

They live in Tennessee, and John is fighting his way back from a major head injury caused by a fall at his home. I'm rooting for that strong guy to continue his incredible recovery.

Every so often, I daydream, appreciating the fact that I was able to learn about the large, loving Joseph family, and although I'm sorry that our paths didn't cross in our youth, I greatly appreciate to have met them in my lifetime. It feels very good knowing we are descendants of the same core group of ancestors.



Pop, standing to the left behind Mom seated, with various members of their family, hosting a visit from Essie's three New York State sisters.



Aunts Nettie and Margaret at a Syracuse Mahrajan, while Meg and Dad enjoy their company.



Jim Yaman and myself during one of my many visits to Cortland.

Chapter 9:

The Unknown

After years of research, I have concluded that there are several important questions about my ancestors which will never be answered. They have to do with a lack of access to information from my grandparents Norman and Elizabeth Hobbie, since they have passed away. The reason unfortunately that I have reached a dead end is that everyone who knew them has also passed away. Added to that bad luck is that the church in Nibeh, Lebanon, that contained all the records of the residents in that small village, burned to the ground years ago. Records accessed by people who shared them with us only showed the names of male descendants. For all the above reasons, questions will remain unanswered.

Let me offer data I have obtained to show you that key information implies connections that I cannot find anyone to corroborate. I use my maternal grandmother, Anna Joseph Sopp, as an example. We visited every year in Homer, New York, and knew all about her husband, my grandfather Philip Sopp and his large family. Never did anyone tell us that she actually had as many as 15 siblings, some of whom we knew and spoke with not knowing we were related. (Was it because she was a woman?) I believe just like in her case, some of the local people like the Josephs, Isafs, Calales, Sopps, etc., did not tell my family because they assumed we knew. That's the only reason I can think of why no one explained it. They did not know that we did not know! We just played with all those kids believing that all Lebanese were related in some way. And in the case of Homer and Cortland, it turned out that almost all of them were.

Based on all other information, my paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Hobbie, very likely had sisters and/or brothers. My brilliant college-graduate cousin Violet Monser Porter wrote to me the following: "Many a summer we spent with your grandparents on River

Street (Oneonta). I close my eyes and think back with gratitude for my father's family. What days they were. Full of love and innocence."

When Violet's father, Illius, came to America at the age of 17, he lived with my grandparents and father in their Beehive (multi-family) apartment house. He told his daughters that my grandmother used to mend his clothes. Anne Monser Gellert referred to my grandfather as "Uncle" (I know it could have been a title of respect). She also said she loved to watch him cooking okra one at a time in their large basement kitchen.

While I was growing up on Winans Avenue, several times my father said that Sam Koury across the street was his first cousin. Sam was George Koury's nephew (the George Koury who brought my grandmother to America). How could my father be Sam Koury's first cousin unless Sam was related to Giddo or, more likely, Sitto? My final data appeared in two articles in an Oneonta newspaper article entitled, "One Hundred Years Ago." One article stated the following: "The building is owned jointly by Norman Hobbie and George Koury, his brother-in-law." The other article said about the buildings, "They had been bought two years before by Hobbie and his brother-in-law, George Koury of Oneonta, jointly." How can that be?

Of course, there's the competing theory when Sitto Hobbie finally arrived in Cranford in 1921. Souma (Slayman) Hayeck was the entrepreneur in Cranford who owned the General Dry Goods Store, serving mid-Eastern families. However, where did Sitto ply her trade prior to that?

In Oneonta previously George Koury was the "Souma Hayeck" of Oneonta. He brought Sitto from Lebanon to work for him, supposedly because he had heard she was a smart, hard-working young lady. I assume he was an uncle or relative because he paid to bring her to Oneonta and outfitted her with the dry goods for her route.

I'd like to offer the descendants another mystery which also will not be solved. Joe Naomi and his family lived across the street from our Winans Avenue home. His son Charlie and I used to discuss how we were related. While both of us believed that we were, we could

find no irrefutable evidence. Again, I'll give you the events, the data, and you can draw your own conclusion. My father and grandfather built this huge house with the help of subcontractors from 1928 – 1930. We moved in in January 1930. Giddo heard that times were hard for the Naomi family in Kentucky, so he invited them to come to Cranford and had three of their family share our apartment. My mother was expecting Ernie in April 1930, so after a few months Joe Naomi's daughter Margaret Winter told me, "We had to move out to another relative in Cranford."

It does not make sense that in my large downstairs apartment where I live alone seven Hobbies living in that same space as me would invite three more people to crowd into our full house to live. Only when the eighth person joined our family in April was it decided that the Naomi threesome should move out.

Surviving members of all the families involved in the above-discussed events are much too young to have ever been around the elders I've written about. Who knows? Maybe the key facts are in a note, document, story, passed down through the decades. If I were 23 instead of 94, I'd have to try to research it.

Other folks I'll never forget
Charlie and Helene Kiamie

Charlie was one of my father's closest friends. I've written so much about him and his impact on his entire family and community in my other books. To most of us kids, he represented strength, fairness, intelligence, hard work, and someone who always spoke his mind, never tolerating phonies. He was someone I could always count on, and he always provided support and sound advice no matter the situation. He served in many positions of leadership within his profession at Western Electric Company, within the leadership of his church at Trinity Episcopal in Cranford, and in our neighborhood. He and his wife Helene (pronounced "Helen")

were parents of four intelligent, caring children: Charles Jr., Karen, Lynn, and Elaine.

After his passing in 1990, Helene took over his leadership role, quietly guiding her children and grandchildren to successful futures. I was honored to be able to call Helene a dear friend, as she struggled her last number of years against a relentless illness that finally overcame her. She never lost her sense of humor during this difficult period. When she personally asked me to deliver her eulogy, it proved to be both a sad and happy event in my life. I felt great love for her, as I carefully researched and selected the words to celebrate her life. She brought so much joy and happiness to her friends and family for so many years that she still remains deeply in our thoughts.

The Other Kiamies

Reflecting on my life, there were two families on Winans Avenue who I thought were my cousins. I was wrong in both cases. One was the Koury's, especially Norm, or Nemo as he was called in his youth. He was a mentor and a dear friend. He and his brother Ralph always referred to me as a cousin, and I believed it until their sister Alice explained to me that I had been misinformed.

The other family was the very large Kiamie family. There were many brothers I referred to as "Uncle." And then there was Aziz Kiamie and his wife Sadie, and their children. I guess the fact that they were our first upstairs tenants in the early 1930s even made them feel more so a part of our clan.

Fast forward to 2025 and most of the old very fine people are no longer with us. Charles, Jr., known as Charlie, is a retired educator and union leader, father of two children, Charles and Julie. He is currently married to his second wife Carolyn, with homes in Cranford and Pennsylvania. Charlie's

in his '70s now, and represents the warm, intelligent characteristics of his family admirably. Julie is a mother and has had a long teaching career. More about Chuck below.

His sister Elaine lives in Cranford, and in her retirement from her AT&T career often offers me her time to drive me to doctor appointments, shopping or any other assistance she is willing to provide. Although I am still able to drive most places and have a friend who drives me if I require it, I am grateful to know of this kind offer of a backup if I need it. Plus talking by phone, Elaine's stories are always very enjoyable because she relates events of my youth which involve my parents and grandparents. That's always fun for me, especially when I hear stories about a time when I was busily raising my own family and/or many miles away.

I miss her sister Karen, who has lived in Florida with her family for decades. When she was younger we had car-pooled for a while to Western Electric, Kearny. I had the good fortune of seeing her when she came to visit her sister, Lynn. We also speak occasionally on the phone, and I always appreciate her warmth and affection.

My father wrote to me in Japan of Lynn's birth in 1954. While all four of Charlie and Helene's children are my friends and are outstanding human beings, I had the closest relationship with Lynn Kiamie Bianchini. Was it because of the incredibly bad fortune she had with her health, the way she took care of her mother all those years that Helene was fighting her own health demons, or reaching out to me as a family friend with many Mediterranean dishes I loved while growing up? I was not the only one who was rewarded with those tasty meals. Her largesse had no boundaries. My brother Ed and his wife Patty often would tell me about a delicious dish Lynn had prepared for them.

I socialized with Lynn and her husband Ralph Bianchini, going to fine restaurants and occasionally happily sharing

lunches and dinners at their home. Lynn often reminded me of when she grew up on Winans Avenue and spent much time in our large side yard visiting with my mother or grandmother. Those descriptions were always heartwarming and left me very happy with fond memories. She never went on a shopping trip that I didn't receive a reminder about so that I wouldn't miss out.

I know of no one who suffered more major health blows throughout her 69 years and still maintained a positive disposition than Lynn did. She always informed me of the latest diagnosis, never complaining, just letting me know. The last time we spoke, she called me from her hospital bed the day before she passed away to wish me a merry Christmas and ask me to drop by to see Ralph so he could give me their annual Christmas present. That gives you a sense of her dedication to people she cared about.

Lynn's happy smile and tenacious thirst for life is sorely missed. I think about her often.

Chuck Kiamie

Two decades ago, I mentioned that Chuck Kiamie might well be another "distinguished Cranford Lebanese-American in the making." Much has happened since 2005. During the ensuing period, he has lost several members of the Kiamie family including his dear grandmother Helene, his very close Aunt Lynn, as well as various uncles.

If you read my previous books, you may recall how instrumental Chuck was in providing me with several subject matter experts who were able to help me in my research. As active as he was as a young collegian, he continues in the tradition of his father and grandfather, only he expanded it to the international stage for USAID. He spent 18 years as a federal civil servant with that organization and the U.S. Department of State.

He recently transitioned to become Assistant Dean, Custom Executive Education, in Georgetown's McDonough School of Business and he continues to teach Middle Eastern politics at George Washington University, where he has worked for 29 years. His wife Rasha Al-Ali is a geneticist conducting hematological research at Virginia Tech. She is working to complete her PhD in translation biology, medicine, and health while managing a prestigious leukemia lab for the university.

Their son Faris Kiamie, a rising high school junior, is class president, rows for the varsity crew team, and does varsity debate. Their daughter Natalie "Toola" Kiamie finishes middle school next year. The family resides in Arlington, Virginia.

I've watched Chuck grow up and I know his grandparents would be very proud of both his accomplishments and his character, true to the Kiamie tradition. He is warm, sensitive, a loving family man, and I feel honored that he considers me his "Uncle Norm."

Arthur Kiamie

I can't allow the name "Kiamie" to disappear from my writing without commenting on one particular young man of my youth whom I watched grow up, follow several professional careers and sadly pass away this year. I'm talking about Arthur Kiamie, a younger brother of Charlie Kiamie. For those of you who read my previous book, "Other Voices," Arthur is quoted on many pages with a wonderful description of my family and the neighborhood in his youth. Arthur's contribution beautifully and in-depth reviewed all the members of my family and most of the residents on Winans Avenue. He was on the money with his superb characterization of each person. He enabled the reader to understand the interactions on that multi-ethnic street from an astute point of view. He truly captured the essence of Winans Avenue.

Arthur was a very personable, well-spoken, highly intelligent member of the Kiamie family. He was a good student, hard-worker, a good athlete, and exhibited a wonderful work ethic. As a young man, he established a painting company and spent some years keeping his crews active throughout the state.

He married the lovely Yvonne Berg, raised their family, and the two of them founded a successful real estate company with headquarters in Cranford. They successfully grew their business and then he left her in charge to become Cranford's fire chief for a period of time. Eventually he returned to join her in running that successful endeavor. And I know that at least one of his children has joined the firm. Unfortunately we lost Yvonne much too soon, and Arthur continued their successful work.

Arthur was a very popular, charismatic person, and I have spent many times with him reliving our childhood escapades. His passing has left a large void in the Cranford community.

George and Helen Hobbib

My entire adult life – long before George and Helen married – I thought of them as the epitome of quality on both my father's and mother's side. Each was closely related to one of them, and in my imagination, when they actually came together, I thought of them as the "Hollywood couple." They both were attractive, intelligent, warm, kind, compassionate, easy to converse with, and always generous with the time they were willing to devote to their young cousin. I always felt enriched after talking with either of them. Helen was the eldest daughter of Fred and Saleamie Isaf, of Hotel Lehigh fame. George was one of the sons of Bshara Hobbib, Giddo's half-brother.

Incidentally, when I wrote my first two family books and was involved in heavy research, I was surprised to discover

that so many families included half-brothers and -sisters. In most cases, it appeared that the male lost his first wife and remarried and created a second family to continue the growth of their clan. As far as the change in last name, that had either to do with Ellis Island or the naturalization process, where people decided to “anglicize” foreign sounding names.

George and Helen lived long, fulfilling lives, having passed at 99 and 98 a few years ago. George was an accomplished industrial leader. They raised a number of children, a few of whom I have met and liked.

Whenever I think of George and Helen, I think of them being among the “best of the best.” I’m always refreshed when I occasionally look into a kaleidoscope of their lives.

Louis Hobbib

Louis is the last remaining child of Bshara and Mariam Hobbib. He lives in Plainfield, New Jersey. He is in his late 90s and enjoys the devoted attention of his children. We speak by phone a few times a year about those decades ago when as children we all frolicked in the very large cellar at 90 Winans Avenue. He lost his sweet and always happy wife Anna some years ago, but remains in their Plainfield home where they had raised their family.

One by one Louis’s brothers and sister have all passed away, leaving him holding the Hobbib torch for the next generations of descendants. Louis was one of those older relatives whom I greatly liked while I was growing up and continue to enjoy our relationship to this day. He has always been smiling, happy, and a pleasure to talk to.



Chuck Kiamie and his brilliant family: Daughter “Toola,” Wife Rasha Al-Ali, Son Faris, and Chuck.

Chapter 10:

Homes

When it comes to homes, I have come full circle. I started off in Cranford, New Jersey, in 1931 being born in the “big house.” This friendly moniker was given to our home by the local residents. It was a very large house, built with loving care by my father and grandfather, with able assistance from local plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and masons, as necessary. It had four garages and a shanty in its inception, and had two additional lots, which were used as an enormous garden and orchard. Hedges stood like sentinels in front of all three lots, with additional ones separating the home from the garden lots. Ample lawns also served as picnic or family gathering areas. And even horseshoe pits were allocated as a small area.

Ernie was the champion horseshoe player in our family, and he and Norm Koury always vied for the street championship. I can still see their laser-like accuracy when they competed.

Although my father exerted overall planning for the multitude of vegetables and fruits that we grew as kids in the 1930’s and ‘40’s, my grandfather was the loving foreman who had daily control of the five sons’ labor force, while my father was away on his daily business route. My parents had a bedroom, as did my grandparents. Four of us boys were squeezed into two beds in the room in between. The adults’ rooms each had a small closet, the boys’ room had a dresser and a wardrobe. My youngest brother had a cot in my grandparents’ bedroom.

Rounding out that first floor was an eat-in dining room and a comfortable sized living room, where guests would congregate. The dining room table had expansion slats, which allowed it to be enlarged to accommodate all nine of us for Sunday or special dinners. On Thanksgiving and Christmas, chairs and an enormously large table would be brought up from the cellar to handle the overflowing

number of the extended family. My memories are of never lacking for the necessities for life.

The only drawback was having upstairs tenants in the front and back. Once in a while there were noise issues, but my Dad ran a tight ship, and those issues were few and far between. Amid that extensive garden was a small basketball court, which my father and grandfather helped to build. Life was very busy and, other than periodically suffering from some sibling harassment until I was 14, I have fond memories of that period of my life. I particularly enjoyed the mentorship and companionship of my next-older brother Ernie, and watching the blossoming of my two exceptional younger brothers Ed and Bob as they matured into fine young men. At the age of 20, I was poised to leave home to college in Elkins, West Virginia. However, before embarking on my first move from 90 Winans Avenue, let me relate a few stories about what events affected me in that environment.

While recovering from my nemesis poison ivy, I remember Sitto soaking my stuck-together eyes with warm water and Epsom salts, and Giddo telling me many stories of Lebanon. He would weave tales of the *Natoor* (wolf) guarding the orchard trees and *Untar*, the strong man who performed many heroic deeds. Giddo was a masterful storyteller, and seemed very credible. We all wanted him to be the one to tell those stories. Pop was the authority figure (doctor), and you listened carefully to every word he said about the state of your health.

I never went camping or canoeing because of the scourge poison ivy on the river banks. I stayed away from hiking or any activity that would expose me to underbrush. There's no doubt that the first 18 years of my life ruined any chance I could ever be a woodsman or nature-lover. I had poison ivy in every season, and eventually became traumatized by even the treatments. Other than one episode at my Herbert Road home in Scotch Plains, I never caught poison ivy after I left Winans Avenue.

Now let's peek in on two Christmases I've never forgotten. I was about 7 or 8, and was sick in bed in the boys' room. I was alone because I had the worst sore throat and a high fever. I really felt

punky. I remember it so well. On early Christmas morning, I heard everyone squealing with delight as they opened their presents in the living room near the tree. Suddenly my father and mother came into my room, and trying to pep me up, said, "Look what Santa got you!" They were standing in front of the bed nearest the kitchen wall looking down, and I couldn't see what they were looking at. They asked me to sit up so I could see better, and when I did, I could see the bright red wagon, which I wanted badly. I recall forcing a smile and lying back down. They had such worried looks on their faces. After I got well, I took that wagon ever where I went. It reigned supreme until it was replaced by a bicycle and then, years later, a basketball.

The other Christmas memory was when I was home from David & Elkins College in 1951. I was the only Hobbie son home with my parents and grandparents and was feeling lonely. I had my large TKE fraternity mug and filled it with scotch. My father was watching me drown my sorrows from that huge mug, and quietly said, "You know, son. The Hobbies aren't big drinkers." I didn't answer or mumbled something that I could handle it. Later that evening, it might have been Christmas or more likely New Year's Eve, I remember trying to crawl into the toilet bowl as I was throwing up big time. Nobody said a word, but I felt bad afterwards when I remembered my mother's very sad, worried face.

Something I just remembered. Pop loved the ocean and wanted to build a house at the shore for retirement. Essie, who grew up in mountainous Upper New York State loved the mountains. She hated the sand. Pop built the house in the Poconos that we visited a few times. Like him, I love the ocean, sand, sun, salt water, waves and the beauty and power of the ocean.

Any car I drove always belonged to my Dad, and he was very generous with it, considering he relied heavily on it for his route, which provided the financial support for his large family. Also, I was competing with siblings, who also needed "wheels." This was alleviated somewhat when the oldest went into the Service, and Ernie bought his own vehicle, which he generously made available on occasion.

When we were married, Jo and I lived in the Irvington Apartments on the Garden State Parkway. It made it easy to visit our parents, south for mine, north for hers. When Gregg was born, we lived for a year or so in Lyndhurst on the second floor of a private home. While we were in Lyndhurst, there's a photo of me carrying this little red-faced baby up the stairs to our second-floor apartment. When he and Jo came from the hospital I remember how I felt carrying that tiny package up those steep steps, saying to myself, "Dropping him is not an option." I always carried him when we were going up or coming down those very steep steps because I feared Jo might trip in her high heels and hurt herself and Gregg. I remember walking very, very slowly because I was carrying a precious package. Shortly after we were home from the hospital, I saw a picture of the famous motion picture director Alfred Hitchcock. I looked at Gregg and said, "Alfred Hitchcock" because there was something about his face that reminded me of Hitchcock. I think those very steep steps to our apartment hastened us to begin house-hunting and end up in Fanwood.

The second home I lived in was in Fanwood, New Jersey, in 1962 on a cul de sac. It was a split-level, and had water drainage problems, which were minimized by digging a trench around the foundation. That house had a small booth kitchen and a combined dining room/living room, which were comfortable. There was an attached one-car garage, but the small backyard was not large enough to plant a garden. I planted a few tomatoes along one side of the foundation.

Chris, Elizabeth (who died after several weeks), and Meg were born while we lived in the Fanwood house. Earlier, in 1956, when I had returned from Japan, I took my savings and purchased a Chevy in Westfield. Next, I graduated to a station wagon prior to my next move. Life in Fanwood was fast-paced, I commuted to New York City and practically lived on the train, and was spread very thinly trying to be a dutiful husband, father, son, son-in-law, breadwinner, home repairman, etc., during an especially stressful point in my life. The last 23 months in Fanwood, I was involved with Western Electric's Speakers Bureau. I found myself flying all over the country,

giving courses for Western Electric employees in motels and/or company locations. While it helped my career tremendously and myself personally, it was difficult for me to be all things to all people in my extended family.

Let me tell you about a few memories of living in Fanwood. When Gregg was a little over a year old, one day we were visiting Cranford to celebrate the Christmas holidays, and when we got ready to leave, Gregg wanted one more jump off the hassock in my parent's living room. Unfortunately, the nearby end table, which I have since moved into a corner, was hit by Gregg and one of the sharp corners split the skin between his eyes. Long story short, we ended up at a Cranford medical office, where a doctor who was a former teammate of mine at Cranford High School stitched him up, and Gregg was fine.

This happened during the first two years of his life, and that is what happens when you are very energetic, athletic, and agile. When we bought our Saville Row, Fanwood, home Gregg began climbing the tree in the backyard. I put up a swing set, which he mastered very quickly. Gregg was like a monkey in the tree and was fearless, which was a complete opposite of my ability to climb trees. I was not comfortable without my two feet firmly planted on the ground.

I recall working with Meg at our kitchen booth with her homework, and showing my dying father pictures that she drew for him. A nurse I showed them to said he was not being very cooperative, and I asked her where his glasses were – that he was blind without them. She apologized and went to look for his glasses. During that time in Fanwood, Chris and I would go to the Elmora Movie Theater and watch “spaghetti Westerns,” and then would eat at the nearby White Castles. Chris and I have our private jokes about how an optometrist in Westfield pronounced his name and also about Monty Python shows. Gregg and I undertook a huge project, setting up a train set that took up most of the basement next to the den. I recall we spent hours in that room working on the trains, putting liquid drops in the locomotive so that it blew white smoke.... It was fun. I'm not a teckie, but I worked hard to understand how to make that train

set work because my kid loved trains. When I could get it to work, Gregg rewarded Jo and me with the happiest look on his face.

I'll never forget the day that our close friend Barbara Fody met her husband Ted and me at the train station to tell him that their son Steve had a kidney cancer called Wilm's tumor. I'll never forget the anguished looks on their faces as they discussed it. We lost Stevie a few months later. I believe Jo told me that some years ago Barbara also passed away, and I'm not sure about how Ted and the other kids are doing. They were very nice people. A couple of times, I met Ted for lunch in New York City at his father's Hungarian restaurant, and he treated us to sauerbraten. I've never had it since, even though I really liked it.

Sometime early in his youth, Gregg and his older cousin Roseanne went to a neighbor's house where there was a swimming pool. Gregg fell in the deep end, and Roseanne just jumped in and grabbed him. I wasn't there, so I only have their descriptions, but I always felt special about Roseanne for her heroic act.

Because I was away from morning until evening in New York City, Jo had the tough job of raising the kids most of the day during the week. How do I remember this time period? I recall glimpses of that cuckoo clock and the lovely sound it made in the front hallway; the downstairs toilet that was clogged for months because Gregg threw a wooden block in it and flushed it. It took a plumber to take the toilet apart to find that clog. Another big event in our children's lives was Chris, Gregg and I collecting Coke bottle tops and filling out a promotional baseball program, whereby you could get beautiful baseballs. I was the hero when I discovered the mother lode in New York City in a small diner where the proprietor opened all the bottles for customers and the caps fell into a small container. One day I asked him if I could have the contents and he said, "Sure." And I brought home hundreds of Coke tops. I can still see Gregg and Chris pasting them down on those forms, the three of us driving over to the Coke warehouse in Newark, and getting 13 brand new baseballs in individual boxes. The smiles on our three faces could not

have been broader. So we made a rule: We put all the boxes in the bottom drawer of my bedroom dresser, and the three of us had to always agree when we'd open a new box. They lasted for several years, as we went through these following stages: First we played catch with the ball; then we had batting practice, which aged the balls; and then when the ball became too scruffy, we would meet and decide to take out a new ball. And that way we made them last. And each time we took out a brand-new ball, there were big smiles all around.

While in Fanwood, I took Gregg and Chris to a couple of NY Mets baseball games, but the one I remember is them looking out the back window of the car while I changed the flat tire on one of the bridges in the pouring rain. Someone gave me tickets to a Jets football game, and I took Gregg. And also in the early 1960s, I took Gregg to the World's Fair, and watched on TV at a food stand while Bob Gibson pitched the Cardinals to a World Series victory.

I have fleeting thoughts of working hard and acquiring tons of new information on my job in New York, officiating basketball games in Fanwood, Scotch Plains and Newark at night to earn extra money which always came in handy near the end of each month; trying to keep the house on Saville Row afloat (water in the cellar); trying to keep my children healthy with visits to Westfield doctors; driving to a fast-food place, Arby's, next to Sears; visiting Joe Grillo and his great Italian ices (he loved all three of the children, and always piled on extra lemon ice), and horseback rides for Meg at the corral on Terrill Road, Scotch Plains.

In 1970, I was promoted to Assistant Manager in the newly formed Safeguard project in Greensboro, North Carolina. Jo and I flew down to Greensboro and picked a house that was being built. Gregg was 11, Chris 8, and Meg was 5 when they all joined me in Greensboro. One of the smartest moves Jo and I made was asking the builder if she could build a 20 x 20 room onto the carport. She did us one better by including cushioned seats all around the room. You could lift each seat, and it contained a storage area for the kids' toys. We bought ping pong and pool tables for the room, and they

got a lot of use. Jo could telephone the children to come in for dinner without leaving her kitchen. We added a basketball hoop and backboard to the front of the carport, which made it perfect.

One winter, the pipes froze at our home and we needed to get a plumber to crawl under the house to fix it. Houses in the part of the South did not have cellars. The soil did not lend itself to gardening. I recall trying desperately to plant some tomatoes in a little area when Jo opened the back door and yelled that Governor Scott was on the phone. He was inviting us to some function at the mansion in Raleigh. The only shortcoming of the Greensboro home was the lack of property. We were only a few feet away from our neighbors on either side.

Sometimes the kids were so involved, we had to come out and get them for dinner. I recall going to get Chris in the dark because he was still shooting baskets. Another time I was playing ping pong with Gregg...who had gotten very good...and he started to ease up because he didn't want to beat his dad. I stopped and told him it was OK but he should just do his very best. I was very touched by it, though. I remember that Gregg's bedroom was right off the kitchen, and Meg and Chris were upstairs. I loved my walk-in shower with its glass door – the best shower I ever had. The dining room was elegant, and so was the living room. Jo selected all the beautiful furniture she wanted, and was proud of the way it all came together. One day we had a kitchen stove fire, and when I tried to throw the flaming frying pan out the back door, the handle melted at the doorway, and the door curtain caught on fire. But we were able to handle it with very little damage.

Gregg played football and broke a finger, and although he later broke his wrist, he fulfilled his dream of playing on the football team. The Jewish community adopted us through our next-door neighbor, who invited us to many social gatherings. I had my first real deli food, and it was great. I believe it was at a bar mitzvah. I can see our neighbors' faces but I can't recall their names. The Marshall family lived around the corner, and when their Cairn terrier had a litter, we bought one of the puppies, and that's how Bonnie joined our family.

Western Electric's Board of Directors flew down from New York City to hold its meeting at the grand opening of our new Guilford Center. It took my staff and me months to prepare for that special visit. The highpoint was a half-hour video we produced with great background music that portrayed everyone working at their jobs on different projects. We invited the governor and all the major corporation business leaders in the area to come to our grand opening. We had special gift items for the employees and souvenirs for the Board. My department was responsible for creating and implementing all of it. It was hard work, but it was a lot of fun.

Those memories of the short three years in Greensboro are never-ending. I think of the Winn Dixie supermarket where we shopped; Chris and his games on the Troxler Team in the basketball league, where he excelled; playing basketball with Chris and Gregg on a court near our house against three older kids...I never shot the ball, but Gregg and Chris were awesome, and I was so proud of them; the warm Zuersher family across the street. In Greensboro, I first learned how to play tennis and fell in love with it. Ron Zuersher and I used to play tennis often. His kids were Billy and Laurie. I believe they moved to Cleveland, and that's where I last lost contact with them. I recently read that Ron passed away about 10 years ago.

One time in Greensboro, many supervisors from New York City came down to a function, and Jo and I hosted them in our beautiful home with a cocktail party. Later we received many thank you letters saying how much that event was enjoyed. One person left a cocktail glass in our curb mailbox on his way out.

One event in Greensboro that stands out in my mind was awakening in the early hours of the morning and hearing a great deal of commotion outside. I got dressed and went outside and on the lawn of the house next door to mine was a car halfway on the soft lawn, where it had made deep ruts. Sitting in the car was a woman, very drunk, and she was crying. I felt very sorry, but I wasn't sure whether it was because of the woman crying or because of the lawn that she had just chewed up...or both.

I recall my big station wagon in Greensboro that we used to take that long ride back to New Jersey on vacations. Sometimes Meg standing in the back seat rubbed my aching neck as I drove, and I was so grateful. We drove up to Cortland, New York, and met my cousin Bobby Isaf and his large family. Sadly, he has passed away. In fact, almost all those nice relatives of my youth are gone.

One of the things I loved best about our Greensboro home was that I was happy my children could live comfortably in their individual large rooms.

When we returned from Greensboro, we bought another home that was being newly built on Herbert Road in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. We had a nice piece of land, the house was on a corner and gave us plenty of elbow room. Each of the children had a good-sized bedroom, the kitchen was large, as was the dining room, but the den with its fireplace was my favorite room. I hired a friend to build bookcases on a wall, and had my dream fulfilled of having a large, active library. We moved in on September 1, 1973, and lived there for about the next 10 years.

I burned more wood in that fireplace than you could ever imagine. I stacked cords in our two-car garage so that I could access them easily during the very cold days. There was a mini forest behind the house, and I constantly was sawing and splitting the fallen trees to feed the insatiable fireplace.

Life continued on the fast track because Jo worked for the Scotch Plains Superintendent of Schools; Gregg received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy, Chris went to Johns Hopkins for pre-med, and Meg went to St. Timothy's School in Maryland. Between staying in shape by playing a lot of tennis, keeping up with a busy job closing out Western Electric's Kearny Plant, and spending a lot of time walking with our dog, Bonnie, I ran just to keep up. I had a small garden in the back of my property and grew some tasty vegetables in an area that needed more sun than it was receiving.

I have so many favorite memories of Bonnie I could write a book about her. The ones I experienced daily were every night after supper

I took her for a walk – or she took me – as I smoked one or two cigars for several hours in our cul de sac, regardless of the weather. It was the most relaxing time of the day for me, as I wound down from the hectic pace of my life. The evenings were quiet, and I would talk to Bonnie as she carefully stalked rabbits, who always allowed Bonnie to come close, but every time she was ready to pounce, the rabbit would turn on the afterburners and leave Bonnie bewildered. As I laughed, I tried to explain to her that she was never going to catch that rabbit.

We eventually sold the house and lived in a series of apartments. Bonnie was given to my nieces Melissa and Karen in Fairfield, Connecticut, where she happily lived out her remaining years. It was at this time that Jo and I decided to separate in 1983. In 1984, my mother passed away, so I gave up my apartment and moved back to the original family home in Cranford. I have lived here ever since. I started with a very large garden, and over the years have just a tiny piece of garden. I drive an old Honda to do a little bit of shopping and Winans Avenue is now populated from end to end with homes that have been upgraded. I recall all those jalopies I had when I first lived in Cranford. Now Willy Cymbaluk's auto repair station is gone. He moved to south Jersey and passed away last year. A huge multi-storied building is now at that corner with apartments and stores. I'm fascinated by the fact that I go to sleep in the bedroom in which I was born.

One of the wonderful aspects of returning to my original home are the photographs and furniture, which lend themselves to fond memories of my ancestors who shared that house since 1930. All this was possible because of my younger brothers Ed and Bob. The three of us took out a loan and paid off my older siblings their share of the market price. By 1991, I was able to repay their generosity and have owned 90 Winans Avenue since then. It has been in the family since construction began in 1928. Last year the squirrels and rabbits devoured all the vegetables I was growing so I turned the garden into a lawn. I now have a very tiny garden because a long-time friend, Erin Biba, annually has a large garden and offers me seedlings of my

choice. I will use some of my many pots for growing my now much-smaller garden.

In addition to sharing the memories of my forebears in this Cranford home, I also experienced the role of landlord. It's the only home that I have had that requires this additional responsibility. On the one hand, it allows you to save some money for the use of your property. It allows you to obtain some financial support beyond income from pensions. Sometimes you can have very good tenants – as I now do. One tenant who lives in the small back apartment, cuts the lawn, shovels the occasional snow, and makes minor repairs when needed. He provides me some small degree of peace of mind. On the negative side, the late Helene Kiamie once told me, “Your poor father never lived a day as an adult when he didn't have someone living over his head, and he didn't like it.” The sudden loud noises can be very irritating. Thankfully, in my previous homes, I enjoyed uninterrupted peace. The last 15 years, I've had good tenants, but prior to that was very difficult. I tolerated some difficult tenants, but it was miserable. Part of the problem was that I had a soft heart (do not have a soft hear if you become a landlord!)

Years ago, I had a young couple in the small apartment and the husband pleaded with me to allow him to park his hot dog truck next to the shanty for a few days until he made other arrangements. Many, many months later, after the lawn had died, I screamed at him to move his truck right now. He moved the truck. He and his wife argued and fought constantly right above my bedroom. Several times the police came in the middle of the night to settle their fights. One night I went outside to see what was happening with the flashing lights, police and spectators. She yelled at me, saying, “Mind your own business.” But the husband said to her, “Be quiet. It's his home.” (I strangled her to death and the police arrested me for murder. Even though I had a good lawyer, the jury found me guilty, and I was put to death. Or...they moved out shortly after that incident. I' not sure, but one of those things took place.) Another time, the large apartment was rented by three young men. They pleaded with “soft heart”

to have a party for their friends. I agreed and went to the movies so I would not get upset because I expected it to be very noisy. When I came home later that evening, it was like a scene from "Animal House." A few guests were urinating against the side of the house, laughing and singing. When I asked them why they were doing that, they said, "There's only one bathroom upstairs." I rang the doorbell, and two of my tenants came downstairs. So I told them what had just happened. One of them replied, "We're upstairs partying. We don't know what our guests are doing outside the house." I said, "That's why you're going to find another apartment. Your guests can urinate on someone else's house; not mine." The next morning, they rang my front doorbell and pleaded with me to forget the incident. But unfortunately for them, soft heart had taken the last stagecoach to Dallas. I haven't heard from him since then. They moved out at the end of the month.

One of my first tenants (before soft heart rode out of town) talked me into allowing them to remove the casing from the upstairs two windows through the use of blocks and tackles so they could hoist a piano into their apartment. I'll never forget watching that piano, not believing I allowed them to destroy the structure of my ancestors' home.

Probably the worst tenant I ever had was the son of one of the two waitresses who lived in the large apartment. He tormented me for over a year before I could evict them. The son is the reason that the front porch furniture is in the cellar. He used to come home from school with his friends and then have fights with the furniture on the porch. When I removed the furniture, he retaliated by jumping up and down over my living room because he usually was home alone. I called the police a few times, but he was smart enough to put on an act until they left, and then he would begin jumping again. I eventually evicted them and used some of their security deposit for repairs. When the mother complained to me about that, I said, "Take a look at what your son did to those beautiful windows that my grandfather built, He etched deep scratches in them, and they'll never be the same. You don't have enough money to make up for what he did. I

feel sorry for your situation, but don't ask me how I feel about your son." She just nodded her head, and did not say another word. That is why no child has ever lived in that apartment since or ever will.

Another time a friend begged me to allow him to store his boat in my shanty for a few weeks. After a year or so, I just told him he needed to move it, and he did. And that's why since then no tenant has had access to my garages or my driveway.

Because I have more than two apartments, I am officially listed as a multi-tenant building and therefore have to undergo a tough state inspection every five years. I have been required to install backup emergency lights, railings, etc., to comply with the New Jersey Housing Code. It has been time-consuming and costly – thousands of dollars. I am responsible for anything that goes wrong, and the next inspection is coming up next year.

My home at 90 Winans Avenue is pretty much the same house as when I joined the family in 1931. I've made a few changes in the hedges, replacing them with trees and transplanting many of my mother's hostas at different places around the driveway, and putting up wired fences on both sides of the house. Inside, there are a few changes, but the core is essentially the one I loved growing up. Here's some more details about what the decades hath wrought. I combined my parents' and the boys' bedrooms into one spacious bedroom, and I also had a fireplace installed in the living room. And I derive a great deal of pleasure from both of these changes.

One special memory still is part of my early years. When I was a youngster on those cold winter mornings, my mother would warm up my clothes on the radiators located throughout the house. They were so appreciated because it always sped up the body-warming process. I'm sure my siblings must have similar memories. Now 94 years old, this fragile body is quick to chill and very slow to warm up. Each time I pick up warm clothing from these same radiators I smile, remembering my mother's act of love doing the same thing for me.

My favorite tree is a very tall elm tree that towers over the house. My favorite shrubs are what's left of the hedges my father and

grandfather planted in front of house. They are slowly disappearing and small trees grow in their place.

It's been especially enjoyable when my sons Gregg and Chris visit me almost monthly to take care of any technical issues I have and spend a few hours chatting about their families and reminiscing about the many dear ones no longer with us. A visit to Ferraro's or White Castles just extends the visit as we happily munch away.

In closing out this section, I must tell you about an eerie happening shortly after I moved in late in 1984. I still can't explain it, and there are probably all kinds of reasonable, logical explanations how it came about. It was at the time I was transferred from my position at Kearny, closing down the plant, to a position on President Tom Thomsen's staff at Berkeley Heights. It was an unforgettable experience.

On that first day, I felt out of place in my new assignment (going from being the "big cheese" at Kearny with enormous power to a very small group at Berkeley Heights of new faces, assigned to new responsibilities I didn't feel skilled in). I had come home from one of my early uncomfortable days at work, parked my car in the garage, and for some reason walked to the very front of the driveway. I stood next to the largest tree and looked up at the house, pondering my future. I was most unhappy about my new assignment. Without thinking I reached my right arm out and leaned against the tree, looking up at the house my father and grandfather had built between 1928 and 1930. The instant my hand touched the tree, a surge of energy coursed through my body, and I smiled as though something had come from that tree into my body, which signaled me that everything was going to be alright. Truthfully, I actually believe my beloved ancestors were giving me a pep talk. I took that smile to work with me, and never felt sad about the move again. I got to know my new colleagues better, and everything kept improving in my new situation. That's as close as I have come to anything that could be supernatural...or was it just my brain seeking help and I went to the perfect place to find it? I'll never know, but I am very grateful, will never forget that moment, and have decided to leave well enough alone.

In reflecting over the houses I've lived in during my life, I reached the following conclusions. The major difference between life in the 1930s and the world of 2025 to me is the family togetherness. As children, everything revolved around the home and the nine people who lived there. There was one breadwinner, and that was my father. Sustaining the family was a full effort to keep my father healthy, mobile, and productive so that the household could function.

The land, three adjacent properties, were fully utilized to grow everything needed in a Mid-Eastern kitchen. Everyone played a role, from digging, planting, weeding, tending, and watering the vast garden to picking, preserving and eventually cooking and eating what was produced. Anything left over that the household required was sold locally, usually by the sons pulling a fully stocked wagon.

As the years went by, the family grew, the children received educations, got jobs, and ventured out to marry and began establishing their own families. Major holidays like Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas still pretty much were centered on the original home. One by one the four original adults passed away. Eventually the increasing number of people in the new families outgrew the seating capacity of the dining and living rooms, and individuals began to withdraw from the togetherness of one single large celebration. Over the ensuing decades, a large percentage of the family occasionally tried to convene smaller get-togethers, and they were enjoyable. There were also several large events hosted by the siblings. In 2001, we rented a large restaurant on Long Beach Island, and had a reunion that was attended by most of the family. If my recollection is correct, there were also several single celebrations at people's houses. My brother Ed and Patty hosted a clambake in Westfield that was savory in every way. Bob and Joyce hosted two events at their beautiful Fairfield, Connecticut home: One was a wedding reception and the other was a family get-together and almost everybody attended. A few smaller events also were held here at 90 Winans Avenue. Although I miss the fun, conversation, laughter, food, and elation at those early celebrations, I completely

understand that everyone had their hands full with the sizes and needs of their expanded families.

A few years ago, my nephew Jon Hobbie, who lives in Bowling Green, Ohio, came East to a high school reunion, and visited for a few days. He and Chris toured the playground of their youth, the schools, the towns, the places where they had numerous memories. That event was a couple of years ago, and yet when I speak with either one of them, they're still laughing about how much fun they had. Those childhood memories and relationships are never forgotten. Before Jon left, we gathered at the Old City Café, a Lebanese restaurant in Cranford, with a few members of Ed's and my families, and enjoyed several hours of good food and reminiscing. We sent Jon off with a smile on his face, and some warm thoughts to carry with him. A photograph of that occasion shows the happiness in our collective faces and hangs now in my dining room.

***Other folks I'll never forget
Joseph and Esther Hobbie***

It's difficult to be totally objective when one speaks about their parents. During their hard-working years they each played their specific role in rearing six boys, five of whom reached adulthood. Both of them worked tirelessly, endlessly to provide all the support, love, nurturing of children with different dispositions, needs, dreams, and goals.

My view of their roles has varied as I have grown older and along the way assumed those very similar roles. You really have to walk in another person's shoes to truly understand the demands, pressure, responsibility of husband, breadwinner, father, grandfather, and even great-grandfather. And in my day the very different role played by wife, helpmate, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Your view changes depending on your vantage point. And of course over the years you learn more about life, about

seeing life through your filtered perception of reality, your conclusions may change.

When I was in Japan in one of my letters my father said that “Giddo was the greatest man in my life.” I wish I had asked him why.

That’s why as I stretch to reach my 95th year, I look back at my parents’ efforts and am grateful that I had the good fortune to be one of their children.

A thought occurred to me a few days ago. During the year and a half that my father was a toddler in Lebanon and his mother was making money to send for him and Giddo, I have no clue about his life. I have to believe that his grandparents in Nibeh, Lebanon, had to have played some role in raising him. If I am correct, that means when he came to the United States in 1902, neither one of them ever saw him again...and he never saw either of his grandparents again.

Unquestionably, they all sacrificed everything for their family, establishing the tradition from back in Nibeh that my father and mother would emulate as they worked to launch each of us equipped to face the challenges of a very changing, restless society. And I am proud to say that my children, each in their own ways and in their different lives, continue to do so for the people who depend on them.

Giddo and Sitto Hobbie

Because I knew them and lived with them from the day I was born, from my infancy to when they passed away in 1959 and 1972, respectively, Giddo and Sitto played a much different role than most grandparents. They also came to the United States in a somewhat unique fashion. As you know, it was Sitto who made the long journey to America, leaving my grandfather and infant father in the care of their families in

Lebanon. She earned the money to enable them to join her a couple of years later.

They lived somewhat of a nomadic life, moving to several towns across the United States until finally settling in Cranford, New Jersey in 1921, as they prepared to return to Lebanon. They had gathered a large nest egg representing the collective efforts of their labor up until that point.

Undoubtedly, because of my constant exposure to them, they had an inordinate influence on my day-to-day life and even when I left home to start my own branch of the family.

Before I move on from Giddo I want to share a recent insight I had of his wisdom and creativity. My late cousin Anne Monser Gellert, who saw him often when he visited Oneonta during the summer, said, "Your grandfather was more intelligent than people thought." A few months ago, during the unusually chilly day of mid-April 2025, I went down to check the cellar furnace, which was always his area of responsibility. It was warm as toast in the area near that furnace.

My mind jumped back to my teenage years in that same cellar and suddenly I visualized that bed that Giddo had installed next to the furnace. As kids we had concocted various reasons why he often slept in that bed, away from the din and roar of five noisy kids. As I felt the penetrating warmth of the heat from that furnace, a thought occurred to me: My grandfather had toiled physically his entire life and suffered from rheumatism. Maybe he slept in that cellar bed next to the furnace because it was in the warmest place in our house during those windy, freezing winter days. I perceive things much differently now that I am the proprietor of a 94-year-old aging, aching body.

As far as Sitto is concerned, her role dramatically changed as she got older and so did my perception of her as I matured. She was finally relieved of the responsibility for that 5-boy family with the very young, inexperienced mother. When

everyone was safely launched, she could relax and be her loving, caring self all the time instead of the enforcing sergeant. And I was able to see her in that new light.

Giddo and Sitto Tommy

I often wonder what my mother's parents were like when they were youngsters in Lebanon, when they were 15 or 16 and began courting. Both arrived the traditional way. Giddo Tommy arrived in the early 1900s with a relative, worked and saved money, and then sent for his family. The great misfortune was that his toddler daughter died during the voyage over.

As a kid, I had the wrong "read" about Sitto Tommy because she was my caretaker during my annual visits to Homer. She rarely smiled, and I don't think she was comfortable being responsible for my welfare. Many years later, everyone I talked to about her extolled her personality, which included a great sense of humor and laughter. Perhaps that's why humor has always been a large part of my life, and I didn't realize until recently where that probably came from. I'm sorry that we never got to share that common aspect of our personality. Unfortunately my memory was that she was always tense and never relaxed when I was her responsibility.

On the other hand, Giddo Tommy treated me sternly as he did all his grandchildren when they were with him. To me, he just handled my presence the same as his other grandchildren with no visible distinction because that's who he was. Unless he was involved in his prowess with musical instruments or bantering with his buddies, he rarely smiled, but was serious about his work and his lifestyle. To me he was a very serious person, and I wanted not to disappoint him.

Dave Roberts

Dave is the son of Charlie Roberts, who was a long-time friend of my Dad. He used to prepare my Dad's income tax, and was a fellow parishioner at Trinity Episcopal Church. Dave went into the same profession and has been doing my income taxes, taking over when his father passed away.

I bumped into Dave on occasion when strolling through nearby Echo Lake Park, where he often walks his beautiful dogs. Dave reminds me of my sons because of his friendly warmth, his relaxed, likeable demeanor, which usually features an engaging smile. He is a very nice man. He is also a subject matter expert when it comes to taxes, and is generous with his comprehensive knowledge. His growing family is attending colleges in different sections of our country. My family is extremely fortunate to have access to several generations of the Roberts family.

Julio Velasco

Located in downtown Cranford is the Foreign Car Repair Garage owned by Julio Velasco. A number of years ago, a friend and I drove into his parking lot and asked if he could replace a taillight bulb in her foreign car. He smiled at us, went into his building, returned with the proper bulb, and quickly installed it. We asked him what the charge was, and with that same warm smile he waved us off saying, "No charge."

Little did I realize at that moment Julio would become not only my reliable mechanic but that we would become best of friends.

I'm not referring to the fact that whenever I need my car repaired, inspected or otherwise, he picks up my car, leaves his small pickup truck, does whatever is required before

reversing the process by leaving my repaired car, picking up his truck, at which time I pay him for his work. In fact, a number of years ago, he sold me that reliable, used Honda that has served me so well these many past years.

On a few occasions, we have had lunch and except for the horrible pandemic we would still be doing so. Julio is from Colombia and occasionally travels there where he owns some property. He and his wife live in the Perth Amboy area of New Jersey near his daughters and grandchildren. I have known only a few people who are as dedicated to solving complicated problems he encounters as does Julio.

He's always reading, he's very cerebral in his perception of the world and constantly looking for answers. He is quick to lend or recommend readings to me that he finds challenging and thought provoking. We on occasion spend time posing philosophical questions to each other so as to get another respected opinion about a puzzling issue. We laugh often, and have developed a big brother/young brother relationship. We have developed a deep affection for one another and I appreciate his caring and concern for my well-being. He has often told me to call on him on any situation where I require assistance for this elderly body. And I wouldn't hesitate to do so. He is a "must read" type of magazine if you want to know what is in his extremely bright mind. For example, yesterday he called to share some random thoughts about life that he had written. He asked me what I thought about them. I then decided to tell him about this book and that I was including some words about him. I asked him if he would mind me using his beautiful words in the book. He was elated, and on the way home from work gave me the paper with his thoughts. They are as follows:

"With every sacrifice is a reward, every storm follows calm. If you do the right thing and it goes unnoticed, when you are gone, it will be recognized and missed. If you persist,

you always get there. With every lesson we learn how little we know. If you collaborate the world will be a better place. We are all different, not better or worse. Just different. And our skin color is just proof of that. Our political and religious views are different, but who is right? Only time will tell. If you are really smart or dumb, there is no need to advertise, it will show with your actions. Love is beautiful when you expect nothing in return.”

That’s my dear friend Julio sharing his thoughts on life.

Erich Schank

Erich Schank rented my back apartment many, many years ago. In the ensuing years, he has been my tenant, my handyman, my colleague, and my friend. I have watched him grow from a young man in his mid-20s to a knowledgeable 50-some-year-old.

He has acquired many skills which, combined with his very keen mind, enables him to continue to grow. We have had many long discussions in the backyard about the perplexities we all face, especially during the Covid pandemic, when because of health reasons and my over-90-year-old body curtailing my weakened immune system I was prevented from visiting people, stores, restaurants, and other places where people would congregate.

Erich has also filled the role of house and property superintendent, which enables me to live in this large house that my parents and grandparents built in the late 1920s.

Erich is mild-mannered, very intelligent, and is a kind person. We have discussed all the issues of citizens of the 21st century, not sure we’ve been able to solve them, but definitely have a better understanding of them.

Dr. R. J. Gasalberti

Although I have been ably cared for by numerous physicians during my lifetime, the following four have filled double roles during my adult life. Not only have they been able professional medical practitioners, they also made me feel like a friend, rather than just a patient. The first one is Dr. Robert Gasalberti, a podiatrist located in Cranford. He works out of a medical building just around the corner from the Post Office. The building borders on the picturesque Rahway River, which provides a soothing backdrop for my memories of that building. Decades ago, I had a successful hernia operation there, and many years earlier I rushed my 1-year-old son there on a Sunday after he sustained a nasty cut between his eyes just because I agreed to his “just one more jump, Dad,” off a hassock while visiting my parents’ home.

Now when I visit that building I’m greeted by Dr. Gasalberti and his one-doctor practice. I’ve been with him for quite a few years in different office locations elsewhere in town, but this to me is his best situation.

He is usually a very happy person, and we chat endlessly during my quarterly visits. We discuss so many aspects of life that it’s difficult for this elderly mind to pinpoint specific topics. We laugh a lot, and sometimes I feel I’m making a social visit to a friend rather than to a doctor’s office.

Dr. G. is flexible in his schedule, and has called me on Sundays to solve a scheduling problem I’ve encountered. I feel like an “uncle” to his daughters as I’ve heard so many fascinating stories as each of them completed their education. And he currently is one very proud grandfather of his older daughter’s toddler.

It’s not often that I say that I’m looking forward to my next doctor’s appointment, but his happy demeanor makes visiting his office a happy occasion.

Dr. Robert J. Martino

Another young, intelligent, personable medical practitioner is my dentist Dr. R. J. Martino, of Clark, New Jersey. It's been many, many years that he has managed my immense discomfort in a dental chair. He has the skill, patience, understanding and demeanor to deal with my claustrophobia, and knows just how to keep it under control. His wife, Jean Binda, is also a dentist, and provides services to the Lyon's Veterans Association. His daughter Sophia Martino has graduated from Syracuse University, and his son Cooper Martino is attending Clemson University.

Over the years, Dr. Martino's superb staff have included warm, friendly skilled people like Betty and Melissa, who have made his modern, expanded office esthetically attractive and very comfortable. Sadly, Betty passed away a few years ago, much too young to leave us. Dr. Martino is another one of those doctors who I think of more as a friend than just a medical provider.

Dr. Bernard Schanzer

For many years, I went to an independent physician located in Elizabeth. Dr. Bernie Schanzer was my neurologist, who cared for a youthful neck injury as well as other associated issues. We developed a friendly relationship and this energetic doctor remains active as he breezes through his 80s. He often visits Israel, and with his twin brother Henry lectures about the Holocaust as their family was greatly affected by that terrible atrocity. After his retirement, he and brother Henry have taken their two-man show on the road to enlighten interested people on details of their fascinating journey through life. I have great admiration for how Dr. Schanzer has devoted his later life to educating young people about this history.

These youthful, energetic brothers have unbelievable stamina and don't appear to waste a minute of their exciting lives. Coincidentally I got to meet his son-in-law when I required teeth implants a number of years ago. Dr. Toren Rutner has offices in nearby Westfield and fits the mold of bright young doctors of this century. We are all very fortunate to be cared for by these engaging subject matter experts.

As I remember my periodic visits to Dr. Schanzer's office, I recall an occasion when he told me that he thought of me as his friend, not just his patient. I deeply returned the sentiment. We share an exceptional chemistry and always enjoy conversing whether in person or over the phone.

Dr. Nicholas Yatrakis

Several of my physicians have helped me immeasurably during my journey of over nine decades of experiencing, observing, coping with, trying to understand, and functioning sometimes effectively and other time failing to achieve targeted goals. Dr. Nicholas Yatrakis, previously of the Summit Medical Group, was my primary care physician for many of the adult years of my life.

He is a giant of a man, perhaps 6'6" or 6'7", but has a soft-spoken, gentle, matter-of-fact style of speaking, which allowed his patients to relax and listen to his sound words. I often took an irritating problem to his office, and always left feeling it was under control and manageable. He had the uncanny knack of getting to the nub of an issue, and rephrasing it in a solvable manner. His soothing voice and demeanor combined to make me feel that my health problems could easily be fixed with some common sense effort on my part.

Prior to his retiring a few years ago, he provided me information about a non-medical question that had bugged me for years. When I was transferred from Greensboro, North

Carolina back to New Jersey in 1973, we bought a newly built home on a cul-de-sac, Herbert Road, that had five attractive, well-spaced homes. Each of the new homes soon became populated except the one furthest from Terrell Road, the main thoroughfare. For years that we lived there I don't recall anyone moving into that attractive house, and we wondered why.

During one office visit, Dr. Yatrakis explained that he had almost been my neighbor. I believe that his mother-in-law had passed away suddenly at that time, and his family moved in with his father-in-law to help him through his loss. So years and years later, I learned the reason for that empty house on Herbert Road.

Although the many doctors I see at Summit Medical Group are serving me well...no complaints, I miss Dr. Nick Yatrakis, his warm smile and extremely gentle manner.



Meg was confirmed while we lived in Greensboro,
North Carolina.



The newly built house on Herbert Road in Scotch Plains, when we returned from three years in North Carolina.



Gregg and Brigid's growing family in my backyard at 90 Winans Avenue.



Chris and Marie bringing Elizabeth home from Russia, while Jo and I look on happily.

Chapter 11:

Food

I find it strange that I have lived almost 94 years on a rollercoaster when it comes to food. As a child, I detested most meats because of their consistency. If I chewed on a piece of gristle of any sort, my meal was ruined. I'm talking about the age of 4 and 5. In hindsight, I think the reason for my parents' and grandparents' great concern was that we had just lost my 9-year-old oldest brother to rheumatic fever. It had been a heart-wrenching loss, which affected all of us, especially our elders. At the age of 5, I ate like a bird, and it seemed that all the adults worked very hard to get me to eat meats and other proteins, while I just picked at potatoes, vegetables, and salads. I ate everything with the family's version of pita bread, using it to satisfy my stomach. I still can't believe they tried everything possible, often isolating me with my beloved grandfather, whom I worshipped. Nothing really worked. There were some dishes that I enjoyed. I liked spinach pies and stuffed grape leaves, I liked stuffed squash, okra and lamb and beans and lamb, my mother's meat loaf.

I also believe that was one of the reasons each summer I was farmed out with my mother to New York State to live with my grandparents in Homer, New York. My appetite began to improve at the time I visited my mother's cousin Fred Isaf at his The Lehigh Hotel bar and restaurant in nearby Cortland. That's where my grandmother Anna Sopp was the kitchen cook. And that's where those tasty hot dogs were stored in a deep metal container. It didn't take me long to figure out how to eat a couple of those tasty treats in a roll with onions, mustard, and Uncle Fred's special sauce. The only hot dogs that competed with Uncle Fred's were the ones that I bought in later life at any Major League ballpark or arena. I also vaguely remember my father buying me hot dogs at Coney Island when I was very young. Other ones that stood out were sold by Nedick's with their popular

orange drink. Once we begged my father to buy us some Nedick's hot dogs, and my memory was that they were great. I believe the reason that the hot dogs tasted good at the ball games was due to the atmosphere of the event, not the quality of the meat.

Also at The Lehigh Hotel, my grandmother sequestered me in a dining room, which contained booths, a juke box, dance floor, and rarely any patrons during the day. They were busy in the bar, soaking up their suds. With a little bit of luck, by the time I was in my very early teens, my sweet cousin Yvonne, 12, would sneak me in an ice-cold beer from the tap (nothing tasted better) to supplement the soft drink my grandmother provided. With an ample supply of buttered Italian bread, I would enjoy those spaghetti meals stuffed and satiated.

Also all of my relatives in Homer and Cortland were excellent cooks, and I ate more than my share of stuffed squash, and other Mediterranean dishes at their homes where I was a frequent guest. During that time period, I learned a very good life lesson. It seemed that when we were gathered around a table of tasty food, the conversation was usually warm, friendly, and extensive. That would prove valuable to me in later years in Japan and also during my career with Western Electric.

But first about my eating habits. As I grew older, I began to enjoy more food, still giving wide berth to meats or dishes which were chewy or distasteful to my palate. Actually it was in high school that my eating turned around at our group lunch tables. This skinny kid would gladly accept "donations" from friends at the table who had eaten their fill. At home I still avoided most meats because the cuts were not necessarily the most lean. The exception was with my grandfather always cutting up a leg of lamb, which fascinated me with the operation of the various knives that he used. My father, to the best of my memory, never cooked a meal...with three cooks in the house, he never had to. But when it came to eating the food, he had a good appetite, and ate slowly and steadily, seeming to enjoy his every meal. However, he did not tolerate any bantering from his

sons at the dinner table. He would always quiet the perpetrator with a backhand or forehand slap after he had given a few warnings. After such incidents, the table got very quiet, as we focused on eating. My grandmother and Essie were the last to sit at our meals. On holidays, we ate dinner in the dining room, and placed “leaves” in the table so it could easily accommodate our family of 9 and any visiting relatives or guests. As the family grew, on Christmas or other holidays, folding tables and chairs were brought up from the cellar and the adults ate in the living room while the kids ate in the dining room. The kitchen table, where we used to have daily meals, on those occasions served as a set-up table for any liquids and desserts – it was a staging area. What great, tasty meals, wonderful memories!

Speaking of food, this month I found a National Geographic TV channel which featured tuna fishing. It was so fascinating watching how they track those more than 500-pound sea creatures, which are the sources of those delicious tuna steaks. I recall eating this tasty seafood years ago in a restaurant named Matisse. I had visited there several times with friends until Hurricane Sandy that deposited the building somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, floating away from all its customers. Years later it was rebuilt inland, but I heard that it closed down shortly thereafter. Back to the TV program, they filmed various tuna boats on their daily outings into the Northeastern fishing grounds. They included detailed footage of their tracking, fishing, catching, then traveling back to coastal centers where their “catch” was measured, weighed, evaluated for quality by removing wedges and analyzing them, and offered a price, usually between \$10 and \$20 a pound. That’s how those fishermen were able to finance future fishing outings and their lives. The boat captains took away between \$5,000 - \$12,000 per fishing trip! That paid for their gas, wages for a small crew, and other boat expenses. I found myself enjoying each expedition, rooting for their success. I am excited by the quest, by the struggle to capture such a large tuna to pay for their efforts so that they can live to fish another day. In a way, it paralleled my Hobbie grandparents and parents drive to succeed in their general

merchandise business during 1900 – 1950. I was truly inspired in watching those determined New Englanders going after their fish.

In 1950, when I attended junior college in Cranford, I went to my first drive-in car hop diner. These drive-in eateries were a fad when I was young. It was just something different that we all got used to very quickly. We experienced it, laughed about it, and then it was in our rear-view mirror. What I did love were those drive-ins where carhops served you those great charcoal grilled hamburgers and milkshakes on some of the major highway stops. I recall my wealthy girlfriend treating me many times in the 1950s. She had a beautiful convertible and a \$25 a week allowance. I had a \$2 a week allowance but enjoyed those gift burgers that she provided us. I had won her heart when the two of us in Geology class were assigned the task of mapping out a portion of the Rahway River. One evening, in the pitch dark, we were completely lost on the wrong side of the river, and had to cross the river to get to her car. She began to panic, so 19-year-old Norm took off his shoes and socks and rolled up his pants legs. She tied my shoes and socks around my neck, and I proceeded to lift her into my arms and slowly waded through the cold river to familiar grounds, safety, and eventually her car. I vividly recall how difficult it was because she was much heavier than she looked, and I managed to smile (dropping her was not an option). Forever after I was her hero. Fate moved against our relationship because I then went from Union Junior College to Davis & Elkins in West Virginia, and then 3 years in Japan in CIC. When she stopped at my Winans Avenue home after I returned from Japan (how did she know I was home?), I made believe I wasn't home. She was with a guy who I assumed was a boyfriend. In later years, I would have been more gracious and met with them. During the same few days, an ex-girlfriend from West Virginia had been calling my mother, who had been stalling her but convinced me to talk to her. I explained that my world had changed in the past 3 years. She now was divorced, had a little boy who needed a father, and I made it clear that she needed to look elsewhere, and the calls stopped.

Back to food and my love affair with it. The snacks that I enjoyed when driving were pistachio nuts, peanuts, gummy bears, and large cashew nuts. I used to keep them in the car console to my right. Friends would often replenish them for me. My favorite pizza topping is cheese when it's hot and dripping. When Jo and I lived in Lyndhurst, I would occasionally drive down Ridge Road into North Arlington, and there on the left was Sonny's, the best pizza I ever had. The closest one to that was when I had a subscription to George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick. Right around the corner was Filippo's. I got to know the Greek owner very well, and when his workers made a fresh pie, it was almost as good as Sonny's. But the reheated ones were just so-so.

My first favorite food was apricots, and soon after, it was any kind of shrimp except pan-fried. Speaking about shrimp, a humorous story occurred when I was leaving Japan. Several police chiefs were taking turns hosting my 1956 farewell to return to the U.S. I believe it was in the city of Ube in Yamaguchi Prefecture, and we were at a restaurant and my host gave an impressive talk about me, stating he knew how much I loved shrimp. My taste buds began thinking about those succulent sea creatures with great anticipation. Everyone was all smiles as we watched the chef march out this huge tray of pan-fried shrimp – the one way I absolutely hated shrimp. I instinctively looked at Matt, my friend and best interpreter, who knew that I hated pan-fried shrimp. He was so embarrassed he could barely speak. Naturally, because the large group of attendees was waiting for my show of delight, I smiled and faked my appreciation by devouring the large plate placed before me. Of course, to make matters worse, the large helpings kept coming from the kitchen because they wanted this to be my most memorable farewell. Eventually I convinced everyone that I could eat no more of their wonderful shrimp. It was not my favorite Ebi Tempura – the deep-fried shrimp – but the attendees were satisfied they had done well.

When we left the restaurant, Matt profusely apologized, but I quieted him down by holding up my hand to stop, and with a laugh

said, “Stuff happens, Matt. At least they’re all going home happy about my send-off.” We never talked about it again, and I have never eaten pan-fried shrimp since then. If my children have a comfort meal for people after I pass away, it’s OK to serve pan-fried shrimp – it might even be called poetic justice!

Now so here I am, my mid-twenties, and what I learned in Japan was that my liaison work with Japanese officials went more smoothly if we met for lunch or dinner and relaxed over delicious food and sake.

I still can’t get over the fact that most of my friends in America drink their sake cold. When I first went to Japan, a colleague had taken me to lunch, and we had cold sake, and it was completely unenjoyable. Later at a CIC party, I noted everyone was drinking very warm, tasty sake. It was explained to me that was how one drank sake. Years later, friends in America tried to convince me to drink it cold, but I am definitely an enjoyer of warm sake.

As things turned out, my public relations work at Western Electric involved periodic meetings with community officials wherever I worked, and it entailed many occasions of “breaking bread” while we conversed. I’m completely won over by those who try and mix business with good food. Throughout my entire working career, I encouraged my subordinates to do so. Regardless of the assignment, at some point it meant meeting with employees, customers, and various levels of management over food. Fortunately, my taste buds were happy, I had broadened my appetite for meat, learning that good cuts of high-quality meat were very tasty.

One of the crown jewels that I sought after was corned beef sandwiches. I went to several famous eateries in New York City: the Stage Deli and the Carnegie Deli – a block apart from each other. The very small Stage Deli was always crowded whenever I ate there. I was squeezed in but the food was superb. One day it closed, and the larger Carnegie Deli got my business. The food was almost as good, but it eventually closed. When my son Chris was at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, he introduced our family to the Homewood Deli, which not only had outstanding corned beef, but they also served

huge steak fries that were second to none. Some years ago, I made a special trip to Baltimore primarily for that incredible food, but it, too, had closed.

Then about 6 years ago, the medication I was taking because of a slight heart attack in 2013 wreaked havoc with my taste buds. I gradually began to lose my ability to taste food. I went through bad periods, where everything tasted very salty. My doctor son Chris hooked me up with a group in Philadelphia who were able to send me mail-order taste and smell tests. The results showed that I had lost most of my taste ability and some of my sense of smell. In the ensuing years, weird symptoms would manifest themselves with my taste buds. During the course of a single meal, my ability to taste would change with almost each bite. Most of the time, I thought I was eating bitter vetch or hemlock. It has not improved one iota.

Despite this handicap, which has intruded onto one of my favorite joys, I still enjoy cooking. My family and friends keep asking for more of the frozen meals I prepare. The wonderful part of preparing meals for this group makes me understand the smile on my mother's face as I always begged for more portions of her tasty dishes. How sweet it is to experience similar reactions from my family and friends. Even though I can no longer enjoy the taste of food, I know that I must eat in order to stay alive. So I try to dream about the dishes I've eaten and places I ate them, and savor that moment while I'm trying to eat tasteless food. As I reflect on those delicious meals from late 1930s until today, my mind can still enjoy those memorable occasions. Before I enumerate those many unforgettable dishes, I want you to know that our huge cellar had a cold storage area where the summer foods were stored for eating the following winter. My grandparents and mother canned almost everything. Tomatoes were the biggest project because they were necessary in most recipes, but fruits were the children's favorites: cherries, pears, peaches, plums, apricots were stocked in mason jars in our front cellar. The back cellar had bushels of apples, pears, potatoes, onions, garlic, as well as housing the huge coal bin. My mother's and grandparents' efforts

produced stuffed grape leaves with an extra touch of lemon; spinach pies; baked kibbe (lamb); okra with lean lamb chunks; string beans with potatoes and lean lamb chunks; lettuce salad; lentil soup, and corned beef and cabbage. In addition, away from home, I remember the delicious White Castle hamburgers; the Kenilworth Inn with the late-night pasta with Italian bread and butter; hot dogs and pasta at my Uncle Fred's Lehigh Hotel; pizza and cold cokes in the early 1950s in an eatery at the outskirts of Elkins, West Virginia; the best-ever Virginia ham steak at breakfast one Christmas holiday on a basketball tour in Virginia; devouring almost as good a ham steak at the Iwakuni Officer's Club in Japan; the best Ebi Tempura at Sawaragi's small restaurant in Yamaguchi, Japan, accompanied by white rice and a little soy sauce. I ate that tempura meal every day during the last month I was there, knowing I probably would never come that way again. (The owner gave me an apron as a farewell gift.) Steakum and Spam sandwiches were always a favorite; eggs over easy with Tobin's sausage links, hashbrowns and toast were delicious; Grillo's lemon ice in Scotch Plains; my grandmother Anna Sopp's lemon meringue pie, which she could make at warp speed; Lamala Femina in Ferraro's in Westfield (pasta, clams, shrimp, lobster; olives and the most unforgettable sauce to dip into); and Ferraro's pasta primavera with a glass of Merlot were exquisite; surf and turf at Rod's Steak House with my sons after teaching a class at FDU; the Spanish Tavern on Route 22, Mountainside, New Jersey, once owned by my good friend Manuel Garcia, where everything was excellent.

In the mid-1970s when I returned to Western Electric Kearny and would have to host luncheons for headquarters' visitors like tax attorneys and such, and Kearny city officials, we would go to lunch in Newark at the great places in the Ironbound section. These Portuguese and Spanish restaurants served a great seafood paella with pitchers of Sangria. Sometimes we would go to the Villa Capri in Jersey City. That was my very favorite restaurant. One year, Jo and I took her parents to this very upscale Italian restaurant. This Italian couple said that it was the best Italian food they ever ate. Now that's

saying something! I occasionally went to the Casino in the Park in Jersey City. I learned recently that it had been a museum prior to being a restaurant. It had the best open-faced filet mignon sandwich, smothered with mushrooms and onions.

The best stuffed artichoke, Italian style, was at La Campagnola in Kenilworth; how can I forget the chateaubriand my son-in-law Donnie and I split at Keens Steakhouse in New York City; pasta was good at many places, but my mother-in-law, Frances Gallo, made the absolute best. But when it comes to meatballs, I like mine the best. I combined recipes from several friends and make them twice as big; shish kebab meat from King's Food Market in Garwood has the best, leanest cuts; egg rolls from One Walnut Avenue in Cranford; baked ziti from Calabria in Cranford; Famous Dave's barbequed spareribs on Route 22 in Mountainside; Old City Café has excellent raw kibbe; the Deli King in Clark has wonderful nova salmon, and has essentially replaced all those closed delis with the exception of Zabar's in New York City, which has great scotch salmon and tasty breads and great New York ambiance; and the Greek Store in Kenilworth, run by Lia Diamandas and her mother Vasi, has expanded the wonderful legacy her late father Steve brought to that location decades ago.

Before winding down this section on how food overwhelmingly affected my life, there are additions that have sweetened my memory at the time when I was still able to taste and savor food. I will relate them in no special order; just lay them out there. In 1952, when I was working at the Jersey Shore, one evening a former high school classmate and I were in a tavern playing darts and sipping cold tap beer. The bar offered thick lean ham slices on rye with mustard for 15 cents, and they were incredibly delicious. I don't recall how successful I was throwing the darts, but I do remember that I went back three times for additional sandwiches. They were that good.

As a youngster, I watched my father plan his garden before turning the managing over to my grandfather. The workforce were my brothers and me. My dad was very creative. He made sure that our several adjacent lots had cherry, peach, pear, and plum trees. He also

had strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries. Plentiful garlic, onions, and tomatoes were planted in addition to the carrots, radishes, celery, kohlrabi, lettuce, Swiss chard, potatoes, rhubarb, escarole, kale, and any other vegetable needed for the dinner table.

In the center of Annapolis, where Gregg was in college, there was a food market with many booths. They featured huge, tasty, roasted chicken breasts, and large cold shrimp cocktails presented in a mouth-watering fashion over a bed of ice. Our taste buds loved the visits. Just a memory of those long-ago visits makes me salivate, which feels almost as good as eating those wonderful dishes.

A few days ago, I was talking with my younger brother Ed, and we laughed uproariously over a youthful episode that featured brand new information. For whatever reason, I had commented about the best-tasting cherries in my life, and they were from a group of trees located in the backyard of a house located on the corner of Centennial and Winans Avenues. The owner was very territorial about those gems, and guarded them like a hawk. We were reminiscing about how our wise father worked out a deal with her whereby Pop, Ernie, Eddie, and Bobbie would climb those very tall trees and pick the cherries for her. (Her children were much older and none lived at home.) We all knew the terms of the bargain: one pail for her for every pail for us. Needless to say many pails were picked, and equally divided. I didn't climb trees, so my job was to lug those heavy pails from the corner back to our house, where Essie and my grandparents were readying boiling water to can those delicious fruits, and eventually join the pears and peaches already placed on the cold shelves of the front cellar for use in the coming winter. The bulk of those shelves were laden with jars of tomatoes used in many Mediterranean dishes. What I said to Ed was that those heavy pails were somewhat lighter by the time I arrived at the house, and the street curb contained many pits from that delivery. That's when Ed told me something I never knew. The owner would watch Eddie and Bobbie from the ground, careful that they were not eating any of her precious cherries. What she didn't know was that as she made her rounds, she

occasionally looked elsewhere. Eddie and Bobbie would quickly pop a few cherries in their mouths, eat them, and keep the pits in their cheeks. When their cheeks were full, they would empty the contents into one hand, put them into one pants pocket, and then repeat the routine. Later when they climbed down from the tree, they discreetly emptied their pockets on the ground. That's how they got to enjoy what they were doing. As far as Ernie and Pop, I have no idea how they handled their situation, but I have to believe that they rewarded themselves in some fashion.

I love it when I hear a new version of an old story with unknown input. All of the kids on Winans Avenue loved these cherries, and there was an ongoing quest every year for those tasty fruits. That's because only one tree was located on the thoroughfare's sidewalk. It didn't take long for the lower branches on that tree to be stripped clean. My cousin Albert Michael once told me that Ernie would hoist him onto his shoulder so that he could reach the higher branches and pick more. Without a doubt, that yard contained the best tasting cherries I have ever eaten. Other times, Ernie and I discovered other locations. Off Meeker Avenue was a house with pretty good cherries, but less plentiful. We attacked it several times with limited success because it was well-guarded. We had our own tree next to one of our garages, but it also had a limited number of cherries. My mother had her backdoor clothesline hooked up to a cherry tree that had much smaller and less tasty cherries, but we made sure we took care of them.

Before I close out the section about food, let me add some thoughts about the beverages that accompanied meals. Although I rarely drink or drank coffee, there was a period in my life when I drank black coffee without sugar and cream. It was difficult but I got used to it, and eventually didn't mind the taste. It helped to control the high cholesterol and triglycerides. I enjoyed coffee only twice more in my life. When I worked in New York City, I would purchase a buttered kaiser roll on my way to work and wash it down with a cup of coffee. It became a daily habit at work, and I enjoyed it. The other period

was my last 5 years at Kearny Works. The entire cafeteria staff had been transferred to me, and our company photographer Bill Zervoulis would each morning go to the nearest cafeteria location and bring sweetened coffee and a bacon and egg sandwich on a Kaiser roll into my private office. It was a wonderful way to start the day.

In Japan, I drank a lot of tea with my meals. In the U.S. I've been on and off tea for years. Now that I have very little taste, I don't enjoy tea except occasionally with iced teas with a lot of ice in it. Now, 94 years old, I very rarely drink liquor, though I occasionally have a non-alcoholic beer. The main reason, it affects the numerous pills I ingest daily. I drink soda pop, juices, and tons of water. At times, the water is delicious. At other times, my taste buds mess around and like to surprise me with an unknown, unwelcome taste.

When it comes to water, even though I'm not a very good swimmer, I absolutely worship it in all its forms. It ranges from an enormous appeal to cold water from the refrigerator, to viewing or wading in the ocean, river, brooks, lakes, whether gushing over a waterfall, or tranquil in a calm lake or swimming pool. In recent years, I've even gotten to enjoy nature in the water such as ducks, swans, geese, sandpipers, egrets, etc.

Getting back to my lost or absent taste buds, despite not being able to taste those excellent dishes, my mind often revels in their memories as I fall asleep at night. To paraphrase thoughts of a similar nature, "Better to have heartily enjoyed those countless delicious meals and then lost my taste buds than to have gone through life never having tasted them at all."

Other folks I'll never forget
Josephine Gallo Hobbie

It's difficult to write about my wife of 25 years. Looking at the relationship from a 94-year-old's eyes reflects a conflict of emotions. Our marriage was the best of times and the worst of times. The best is when I reflect on my incredibly

wonderful children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchild. They would not exist had it not been for our union... and the world would have lost out on their irreplaceable presence. And there were good times and laughter as Jo and I shared many common interests and enjoyments. Then, however, there were the life-threatening, stressful periods, which would have ended badly had it not been brought to an end. I will never forget the years of happiness, laughter and good feelings. My kind, talented, intelligent children are a constant reminder of that.

Jo was an attractive, charming, engaging person, a warm hostess, a skilled interior decorator. She made friends easily and was a devoted and caring mother and grandmother. She was also a smart, efficient, effective worker both at Western Electric where we met, and at her long career as the secretary for the Scotch Plains Superintendent of Schools.

Jo was a very caring human being, who probably didn't get to realize all her goals in life. She did experience some of them because of the places we went, the people we met, and the respect she received in those places. For example, when we visited North Carolina Governor Bob Scott and were invited to a ball at the mansion, she met many dignitaries who fussed over her. The look on her smiling face telegraphed her feelings to all. She certainly was more than elated when the Governor invited us to sleep over.

Another example was on board a major ocean liner to attend a farewell party for friends who were about to sail abroad. Or to attend many Broadway theater productions in New York City because she loved attending those plays and musicals due to our shared interest. We also both enjoyed the fine restaurants that preceded or followed those events.

Frankly speaking, Jo would have been extremely happy if she could have done activities on a regular basis instead of only when we could squeeze out a few dollars from our

tight budget. In other words, had she married someone who was well-off instead of starting from scratch as we did. Sadly Jo passed away several years ago, and was laid to rest in the Lyndhurst, New Jersey, area near her parents and our infant daughter Elizabeth.

I strongly feel Jo departed this world with the confidence that she had left it with many loving emissaries.

Meg and Donnie Guynn

The youngster in my family, Meg, enjoys an extremely fulfilling life on her and Donnie's 8-1/2 acre property in Arcadia, Florida. Now that I've become conversant with Face-time, she takes me on tours of her beautiful property, highlighting the many barn animals and pets, pond, rows of trees, a second house they had specially built for the late Jo during her final months, as well as their own well-organized, attractive home.

Meg has for years been trying to put together her own small business. Donnie currently owns and runs a plumbing company. From all indications, Meg is about ready to launch her business. So time will tell if she has tapped a vein to which consumers will respond. Regardless, it's admirable the way she has persisted for years trying to craft a business that can offer a needed product.

Included among the above stated goals, Meg and Donnie plan to travel extensively over the next six months. These trips expose them to various ways of life, and enable them to expand their horizon in this ever-changing world. They recently surprised me with a Facetime call from Spain, where they were enjoying a tennis week at a pro's camp.

Chris and Marie Hobbie

In his early 60s, Chris is a radiologist who pretty much has his own practice with all the necessary electronic equipment installed in a wing of their spacious, beautiful Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, home. He also works nearby filling in at a local medical service supporting their radiological requirements.

His wife Marie always offers a smile and happy mood whatever we talk about, especially if it's about one of my grandchildren: Elizabeth, a registered nurse like her mother; Cory, who runs a small vaping business; Caroline, who recently graduated from high school and is a certified cosmetologist; and Christopher, who graduated from Penn State and began work at Amazon. And, of course, Marie gives you a big smile if Boston College or any other New England sports team emerges victorious in any athletic event.

Since the children have moved on to engaging occupations, Chris and Marie find a little more time to travel to events like the NCAA 2025 Basketball Final Four in Cleveland. They also are getting to see things like the U.S. Open Tennis Championships in New York City or to hop on a plane to visit Florida showplaces and Meg and Donnie in Arcadia.

Gregg and Brigid Hobbie

My son Gregg is in his mid-60s, has a stand-alone law practice, and lives with his wife Brigid in Tinton Falls, New Jersey. Brigid is very talented and artistic, both in her early modeling career and her later jewelry creations.

I drove to their beautiful home recently, after not having seen it for years, and was overwhelmed at the status all these years later. The trees and shrubbery were fully grown, and the picturesque view of the always pleasant-looking abode revealed a large, well-kept property and home.

The major difference in their lives is that they are now grandparents. My great-grandson Albert is the 5-year-old son of Jared and Kitty Hobbie, who after a stint in California have relocated to Summit, New Jersey. Gregg and Brigid's son Drew is studying in Savannah, Georgia, pursuing a career in the theatrical world. Daughter Lauren is involved in counseling people who require her help in resolving personal conflicts. Gregg and Brigid continue to provide the warm family home – both physically and emotionally – all the children can gravitate to.

Some of the Medical Doctors

I would be remiss if I didn't take the time to recognize some of the doctors who were instrumental in keeping me alive these 94 years. They varied from the older established position to the young ones who have just begun what I predict will be long, successful careers.

I am especially impressed by the many male and female doctors, many of whose families came from far-away lands, who have constantly displayed skill, dedication, sensitivity and warmth. I am so grateful for their attention and care of my dwindling physical capabilities.

There are far too many to name, but I do want to single out a few who have definitely extended my life a number of years.

However, before I discuss them, I want to credit my younger son, Dr. Christopher Hobbie, for helping me in many of these cases by counseling me about the sometimes perplexing options available to me. Chris is a radiologist by training and brings an already keen mind with the added benefit of an excellent medical education at Johns Hopkins and Yale Universities. They have combined to position my son as a valuable advisor to help me understand how to cope with the issues of growing old.

Dr. Avinosh Kothavale: When I experienced a slight heart attack in 2013 I asked physicians at Summit Medical Group which cardiologist should I entrust with my recovery. The advice was overwhelmingly Dr. Kothavale. It was a wise recommendation because he has served me well. His 12 years caring for my changing needs have been nothing short of miraculous. Three years ago, he told me I had a narrow window of opportunity to replace my faulty aortic heart valve, and as predicted I began to fade rapidly. He recommended the TAVR technique and that's when I got very lucky. I selected Dr. John Brown, the highest-ranked surgeon in the tri-state area, to perform this delicate type of surgery. I was examined by him and his colleague Dr. Larry Blitz. The operation was done at Morristown Hospital. As luck would have it, I began deteriorating very rapidly and when I informed their office, thankfully they were able to move up the date of the procedure to mid-February 2022, replace the faulty heart valve through the delicate TAVR procedure, and on the following day, arranged to have a pacemaker inserted. Their efforts have given me three additional, very happy years, thanks to the brilliance of these skilled physicians. Dr. Kothavale, who also is an attending physician at Morristown, visited during my recuperation. I must credit the excellent Morristown Hospital nursing staff with their exceptionally fine treatment for this elderly sometimes difficult patient. I wish I could remember their names individually. One more event that underscores how valuable Dr. Kothavale was in extending my longevity occurred during that period. After my successful surgery and recovery at Morristown, I was OK'd to return home. Dr. Kothavale stopped by to examine me before I was discharged, and told me he preferred that I stay one more day. I was anxious to return home, but I had faith in him so I agreed.

Later that day, a nurse escorted me down a narrow corridor to test my endurance. I began feeling dizzy, stopped walking, and leaned my back against the nearest wall. I began

to lose consciousness and slowly began sliding down the wall, and the nurse grabbed my arm to ease my fall.

As I regained consciousness sitting on the floor, a sea of aides, nurses, and other staff member had blocked the light with their overwhelming presence, rapidly asking me many questions. I threw up my hands, gesturing that I didn't know how to respond. Suddenly, a stern voice from a very pregnant doctor made a brief gesture that instantly shut down the crowd which immediately backed away. She asked me a few questions about when I had recently eaten, and had me return to my bed. Imagine if I had gone home as originally planned and passed out at home, where I live alone? Thank you, Dr. Kothavale. More recently, he suggested we probe the cause of my congestive heart failure, and was able to diagnose amyloidosis and assembled a team of doctors to address the issue.

Dr. Lowell Gurey: Although I am indebted to so many doctors from the Summit Medical Group as well as some from the Atlantic Health Group, I want to single out one more unique procedure which occurred in this late period of my life. Dr. Lowell Gurey is a young, charismatic physician at the Summit Medical Group. I had lost my voice a few years ago and this engaging physician worked on my throat for several visits, eventually injecting some type of silicon into one of my vocal cords. He felt that it would temporarily help me, and I would have to renew it in three months. Thus far I have not required a single follow up. The young Dr. Gurey also possesses an excellent sense of humor. When he inserted the silicon into a vocal cord, I must say that procedure does not rank as one of my favorite moments in life. Afterwards I quipped to him that I understood why he needed a second physician to assist him. When he asked me why was that, I said, "You needed him because you were so far down my throat you needed someone to hold onto your feet so that you wouldn't disappear." All three of us enjoyed a very hearty laugh.



Donnie, Meg, and I having a great time at Ferraro's, in 2025.



My greatest happiness: Gregg, Chris, Meg.



Chris and Marie sharing a warm and loving family moment with me at Ferraro's in 2025.



Meg and Donnie flanked by brothers Gregg and Chris.



One of my early favorite photos: Some of the family at Yaman Park on the occasion of the 2005 reunion of extended family and friends in Cortland.



The kids took me on a cruise around New York City for my 80th birthday.



We all had a great laugh after our Ferraro's luncheon celebration at Granddaughter Caroline's quip about this photo: "It's Grandpa – before and after!"

Chapter 12:

Our Three Kind and Caring Children

I gave a lot of thought to how I would portray the dearest three people in my life. I've read letters they wrote describing the values that I passed on to them, I've looked at the many photographs of them available to me, I ventured into outer space to look down at their lives, and here's what I saw when I pressed the replay button.

First of all, there was this tiny, ruddy-faced kid I carried up those steep steps in Lyndhurst, New Jersey, in December 1958. The memory of a well-built crib, which constrained the agile Gregg until he grew big enough for his spectacular surprise. He bounced into his parents' bedroom with such a grin of accomplishment because he had hurled himself over the bars of the crib, landed on his feet, and was ready for bigger challenges. Unfortunately, his investigative nature almost cost him his fingers when he tried to collapse the metal highchair. He escaped unscathed, but a little shook up. Of course, next came that "just one more jump" off the hassock in my parents' Cranford home. He lost a lot of blood without lasting damage. I can still see him climbing that tree behind the house on Saville Row in Fanwood, New Jersey, or trying to reach the stars on those skimpy swings I had erected nearby. And the grateful rescue by Jo's niece Roseanne, when he fell into a neighbor's swimming pool, and she jumped in to retrieve him. All this, and he was still a very young, active boy. Much of his outdoor activity at this time involved his close friend Kenny Fody. Also an inordinate amount of time was spent in our cellar at Saville Row, where we erected a toy train set that actually made sounds and blew smoke. We had a lot of fun trying to keep the caboose and cars working as they careened around the extensive set of track rails. Later, I saw him in those Saville Row years when we all collected Coke bottle tops and went to a Newark warehouse, where we were given a bunch of baseballs for our collective efforts. Gregg,

Chris, and I treated them like gold, enjoying pitch and catch, and batting at LaGrande Park in Fanwood. We had fun vacations at the beach, and once at my parents' Poconos house. Before we went to Greensboro, North Carolina, Gregg had the enjoyment of learning his multiplication tables from his grandfather, Joseph Hobbie.

Then it was 3 years in Greensboro, where Gregg sat in Governor Bob Scott's chair on a few visits to the Governor's Mansion. While in Greensboro, Gregg excelled in basketball and football. Unfortunately his enthusiasm for football cost him a broken finger, then a broken wrist just as we were transferred back North to New Jersey. The wrist did not heal properly, and he lost his nice touch with the basketball.

One of the treasures we brought back with us to New Jersey was Bonnie, our Cairn terrier. Back in New Jersey, our Cranford and Lyndhurst families were visited often. After enrollment in Union Catholic, and playing some basketball, Gregg focused on track, where he and another friend excelled, which helped him to obtain an appointment to The Naval Academy at Annapolis. The entire family enjoyed our frequent visits to football games and other events in Annapolis. It was a fun period, and we had some great meals from several wonderful restaurants.

Gregg fulfilled his Naval Academy obligation by serving aboard the submarine George C. Marshall for several years. We were able to keep in touch with him by mail, and learned about the many far-away places he visited, and as an officer, his confidence about his work grew tremendously. The last month of his service was on the East Coast so he was able to visit his grandmother Essie, who fed him many of his favorite dishes when he stopped to have lunch with her.

Gregg decided to obtain a law degree, so he lived with me while attending Rutgers Law School. After brief stints at several law firms, Gregg opened his own private practice, and is kept very busy by his active schedule specializing in Social Security and Long-Term Disability clients. I'm so impressed by his passion and commitment to helping people like these during the times of their greatest need.

Gregg married Brigid Roeser at a beautiful West Point ceremony. Brigid had a successful modeling career, and then applied her artistic talents to creating beautiful pieces of jewelry. Brigid was a very caring daughter. Her late father, Albert Roeser, was one of the countless American Doughboys (infantry men) who fought in and survived World War II's Battle of the Bulge. I used to be enraptured by his detailed descriptions of what he and his comrades experienced during that harrowing campaign in wintry Belgium.

Gregg and Brigid raised Drew, Jared, and Lauren, and are grandparents of 5-year-old Albert. Brigid is a devoted mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, and daughter-in-law, rich in love and support for her entire family. Gregg and Brigid have an attractive home in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, which remains the hub of activity as their growing family branches out. Although the children may travel afar, they gravitate to that comfortable, spacious home, which Gregg and Brigid live in with short and long visits from their children. A lot of activity revolves around that homestead.

I speak often with Gregg, who has embarked on a healthy walking routine that involves their dog, a nearby mall, and the Jersey Shore. He remains a very active, caring, compassionate person, has a positive outlook on life, and maintains a strong family and work ethic.

Chris was born on November 30, 1961, and brought a different temperament to Saville Row. He had a constant smile on his face and was always quietly investigating things and life. He opened almost all the cabinet doors to see what was behind them, but he rarely closed them. He would play with the toys in his playpen without complaint unless someone bothered him. Then he wanted out and activity. I recall one day as a toddler he opened the car door (the car was parked on a slope) and released the hand brake. Fortunately, Jo happened to be nearby, saw him, and screamed. She grabbed Chris and pulled him away from the rolling car, I jumped into the car and got it under control as it reached the bottom of the driveway. Luckily no one was harmed, except it took forever to find Jo's glasses, which were many, many feet away from the incident. She was definitely the heroine of that event.

Chris was more like me than his older brother. He also didn't climb trees. Chris never liked gristle in his meat, and fastidiously removed it. Like his brother, he was talented and very intelligent. In third or fourth grade, Jo and I went to Back to School Night, and his teacher said he was easily bored. When the other kids teased him because he would wander around, she told them, "Don't laugh at him. He's going to be a rich man one day." Chris was quick to move to tears, but twice as quick to smile again. Chris and I shared a strong interest in "Star Trek." He became a subject matter expert, and in 1973 I took 11-year-old Chris to join the massive crowds seeing them at the Statler Hilton in New York. We later shared a lot of enjoyment over the "Yellow Submarine" and the "Pink Panther" movies. During those years, Chris and I bonded over White Castles in Elmora, New Jersey, and attended the "Spaghetti Westerns" featured in the theater of the same name. He obviously inherited my movie attendance gene, and I think he still indulges himself in that form of relaxation. Chris loved street hockey, and I went with him to Scotch Plains and I became educated about that little-known activity. He loved it when the family attended Broadway shows, and still remembers titles, actors, and the subjects. Like Gregg, he often commented on the value of those long drives from Scotch Plains to Baltimore and Johns Hopkins, where he did his undergraduate work. He feels that we shared love, wisdom, and support during those periodic trips to and from his college campus.

A story that has become a legend for us is when he stopped at the mailroom on the way to one of his classes. He described how he and his roommate sat in the back during a lecture, devouring Essie's cold spinach pies, which had arrived in the mail. As a lover of those tasty triangles, it was easy to visualize that scene. Chris recently reminded me of the two weeks the family spent in Wildwood, New Jersey, at a beach home a co-worker gave our family one summer. It wasn't our usual Shore retreat, so we learned more about our home state on that visit.

One of the things that a parent doesn't know is how their children are reacting to new situations, events, and experiences. With

the benefit of his own drafted letter to me here at 94-years-old, I'm learning how Chris reacted to Western Electric's newly built Guilford Center, brief home of the Safeguard Project. As Public Relations Manager, I had responsibility for various aspects of the public face we put on the project, but one-half century later, I'm learning about how my then 9-year-old son experienced and remembered it. He wrote, "Going to the Guilford Center in the early 1970s and seeing the incredible technology and the touchtone phones (way ahead of Facetime) was mind-boggling."

Chris still remembers the great dinner parties at Grandma Essie's, Uncle Ernie's, Uncle Ed's and Uncle Bob's over the years. As adults, we were soaking up these warm feelings with the other adults not realizing that the youngsters were not only filling their stomachs with delicious dishes, but their heads and hearts with warm, loving memories. Thankfully, I've lived long enough to hear these words that were only thoughts in my children's minds all those years ago. While we were in North Carolina, Chris loved the fact that Grandma Essie used to send us 10lb bags of pistachio nuts. He also remembers that Lebanese grocery store that also sold gas at 31 cents a gallon. The proprietor always fussed over Chris and Meg when they came with me. When we returned North, Chris and Gregg would come with me to the games in the softball leagues I played in. He dazzles me by remembering the names of most of my teammates. He also told me about his memories of crabbing behind the Acme Food Market on Long Beach Island as being something he loved. He also remembers those little gifts I brought home to my children after my frequent Speakers Bureau trips. He loved the Christmas chestnuts from the New York City street vendors just as much as I did. Little did I realize that Chris enjoys and remembers the music of that era that I enjoyed and listened to, and unbelievably recalls details I have long forgotten.

Chris married Marie Vaughan, a nurse who is Boston College's best sports fan. She and I talk about every sports contest BC plays. Marie has the ability to handle everything; to visit her parents and siblings' families in New England; maintain a busy, large household

in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania; to be there for the differing needs of each of her four children, including traveling to competitions with the very excellent cheerleader, Caroline; to go into New York City with Chris to attend theater and restaurants; to work a part-time job; send her father-in-law (me) photographs when she and Chris attend NCAA sports tournaments in far-away cities; and still be there for Cory, Elizabeth, Christopher, and Caroline whenever they need “Mom.”

I enjoy cooking and try to make my dishes available to my children, grandchildren and their families. I specialize in very large meatballs, stuffed squash, string beans and lamb, and okra and lamb frozen dinners. Whenever I cook, I use several pots, and try to freeze an abundant amount. It works well because Gregg and Chris try to visit monthly, where we will lunch out, talk about the family, get any electric gadgets fixed that are annoying me, and then I try to send them home with frozen meals for their families. They are always fun visits.

Meg was born July 23, 1964. As I have previously written, she had a very tough first year, but she was a fighter and just wouldn’t give in to the various issues that were pounding her. Fortunately, she got through those difficult days, and by the age of 2, most of the physical problems were behind her.

Between my hectic travel schedule throughout the country and trying to earn extra money officiating sports events to help feed and maintain my family, most of Meg’s care was in Jo’s hands. When we vacationed at the Shore or Poconos, I had much more Meg time. When we moved to Greensboro, the 5-year-old wasn’t prepared to cope with those adventurous girls on our street. I did have a little more time with her, and often took her with me when I went places. She came with Jo and me to the Governor’s Mansion and, like us, stayed overnight. We had a few meals there, went to a football game, and she spent her time with the Governor’s daughters, who were roughly her age.

It’s when we returned from North Carolina in 1973 that for a few years she went through a rough patch, trying to adapt to a much different environment. It was sort of good news/bad news. Some of the new friendships didn’t work out well, but some did. Her brothers

were attending Union Catholic High School and seemed comfortable in their new surroundings. Sometime during that period Jo began working full time for the Scotch Plains School Superintendent, I was overwhelmed at Western Electric's Kearny Plant, coping with legal issues that required a great deal of my time, and I was spread very thinly. Meg meanwhile pursued her hobbies, which included horseback riding and a love of animals that continues to this day. Meg and I shared many great times together: making spam sandwiches, listening to favorite music in the den, splitting wood for the fireplace, and maybe best of all, working together in the garden by the house. As she said to me a few years ago in a letter, "My love of gardening, nature, and wildlife first developed with you. I would watch you lovingly nurture the seeds of our bounty and curse the weeds of the hot summer days. It was fun, and I learned so much." She says, "I remember a few hot summer nights working in the garden until sunset, when the mosquitoes would feast on our sweet blood. I felt there was nothing like a juicy beefsteak tomato sandwich with mayo or cucumbers drenched in leben or yogurt. Yummy! So thankful."

Meg also wrote, "Your love of writing, reading, the arts and music served to be a beautiful way to learn and be inspired. I remember how many a night, tired or not, you would calmly teach me my multiplication tables. I can see the blue card on the kitchen counter. Despite my lack of confidence, focus, and resistance to writing, you patiently edited paper after paper until I developed my own personal writing style. Who would have thought that at this age I would be launching a blog and sweating through piano lessons? I'm grateful!"

After the boys went away to college, almost every night after dinner, Meg and I would walk with our dog Bonnie. She recently wrote, "Our chats fueled my intellect and filled my heart. I learned so much. The nights we walked in silence were tough. I was processing and trying to release the frustration of growing up. Thank you for being the example of how to handle challenging situations and allow nature, the breeze, and the stars to discharge negativity. This is the primary way I clear my head and heart today. Thankfully, it is usually from a

long, positive, fulfilling day of productivity. Sometimes I look up at the stars and send you love from Florida. Thankful to know we are always joined in heart, mind, and spirit.” What an epiphany! Decades later I found out that while I was slowly strolling around our cul de sac with my daughter Meg, our dog Bonnie, and very enjoyable cigars in tow, unbeknownst to me until the 2020s, Meg was absorbing and figuring out how to catch the wind and face life’s journey!

Donnie and Meg married in June 2010 in Florida. He heads up a successful plumbing company and literally walks the walk. He spends a lot of time actively being involved as both a skilled plumber and the boss/owner. Meg, who has had careers in being a masseuse and teaching yoga, is now actively working to launch a clothing business later this year. Donnie is an exceptional young man: caring, kind and intelligent. We enjoy our banter about food and laugh a lot. I consider him to be my third son.

Fast forward to 2025, Meg and Donnie thoroughly enjoy their 8-1/2 acre land where they work together to run their businesses and enhance their beautiful property. Remember I told you that as a young girl Meg took horseback riding lessons, where she was taught to “muck out” stables. That’s why when she calls me today from her barn besides introducing me to her many animals, she’s always smiling because she still enjoys mucking out her stables.

One of the wonderful efforts they made several years ago still moves me. They built a second house on their property amid their barn animals and house pets, exclusively to be used by Jo when she became very ill. Meg was able to help her mother with months of love and support, and eased her gently to the end of her life. What a noble deed!

I am always thrilled when my children tell me about times they spend together with their spouses, just the two of them. Meg and Donnie have done a great deal of traveling this year. Those shared experiences are crucial to forging a long-term relationship with one another. It’s the main difference I would have made in my own life. I learned a lesson somewhat late. But I work hard to pass the lesson to

my children. Even as I write today, I'm picturing Meg and Donnie as they flew to Aruba for a 5-day vacation, where they are mixing meeting old friends and vacationing.

All three of our children are very fortunate because they are highly intelligent, family-oriented and caring.

Well, there they are. My three children with their attractive, intelligent spouses facing the future, replete with problems, challenges and solutions. I occasionally take a peek into the past and wonder what life was like when my ancestors were youngsters, trying to sort out their opportunities from the perspective of what faced them in their small, impoverished villages in Lebanon. What gave them the courage, the foresight to risk an unknown future, thousands of miles away in a country they only heard about?

I am hopeful that their emissaries of today...my children and their families...have the courage to perpetuate that growth. My job was to outfit each of my children with the tools to become airborne, with their pockets overflowing with values, virtues, and noble characteristics that will equip them for their journeys into the future.

I consider that the best thing I did in my life was raising three incredibly gifted, kind, caring, intelligent, attractive, wise children. As I sort through my mind of memories of different phases of their lives, I vividly recall the joy of holding each of them, watching them learn to walk, then run, then play. Their individual growth was my ongoing joy. It made any hardship worthwhile. Coming home to their beautiful faces soothed all the wounds from my battles at work. Watching as each of them stretched upward to find their place in this complicated world was delightful. And, of course, the greatest pleasure for me is to have been lucky enough to live enough years to watch the maturing of each of them, and how they all care about humankind and the vast world around them. Seeing all three of them in successful, beautiful home situations is more than any parent deserves. I've been so blessed.

Today, most human beings and their relationships remain on a superficial level. Strangely, the opposite can also be true. It's the

internet and eventually artificial intelligence and the ability to master them wisely that will allow generations to reach their collective full potential and contribute to the world at large. What I'm saying is that if you simultaneously reinstate effective interpersonal communications while utilizing the internet and artificial intelligence, it will profit humankind.

Donnie, Brigid, Marie, and Kitty have added so much to the warmth and love of our family. The Hobbie family is very, very fortunate to have received such awesome additions to our clan! I consider myself extremely fortunate to have lived long enough to see my daughter Meg and my three sons Gregg, Chris, and Donnie evolve into such admirable, gifted human beings. I know there is much more I can say as I look at the extended family with the talents of numerous youngsters who are in the process of finding their own distinct flight paths. But that's another bite of the apple.

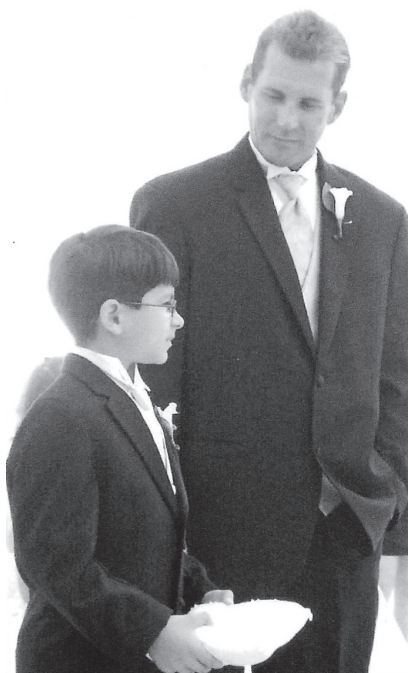
My pleasure is in enjoying all of them. I count my blessings to have been born into a family that, in spite of a few painful periods (only a few compared with the gifts) provided me with the tools to cope with this complex world. When I think about the people I've met, the places I've been to, the many experiences, mostly good, and to emerge on the good end of this eventful, rewarding, fulfilling, educational life, I consider myself lucky. My greatest gift to humanity is to leave it in the care of my children, who are incredibly talented, sensitive, loving human beings. Each of them is involved in improving the world, and is engaged in their own journey of learning, experiencing and growing into the best person they can be...and I'm the lucky guy who has gotten to watch so much of it.



Chris, Dad, and Gregg
supporting our beloved
Mets at Citi Field.

Chris standing up for his
sister at her wedding in
Florida in 2010.





Donnie and Christopher,
the ring bearer.



Donnie and Meg,
happy together.



Gregg and I enjoying each other's company.



Gregg, Dad, and Chris enjoying prime ribs at Smuggler's Cove in Pennsylvania.



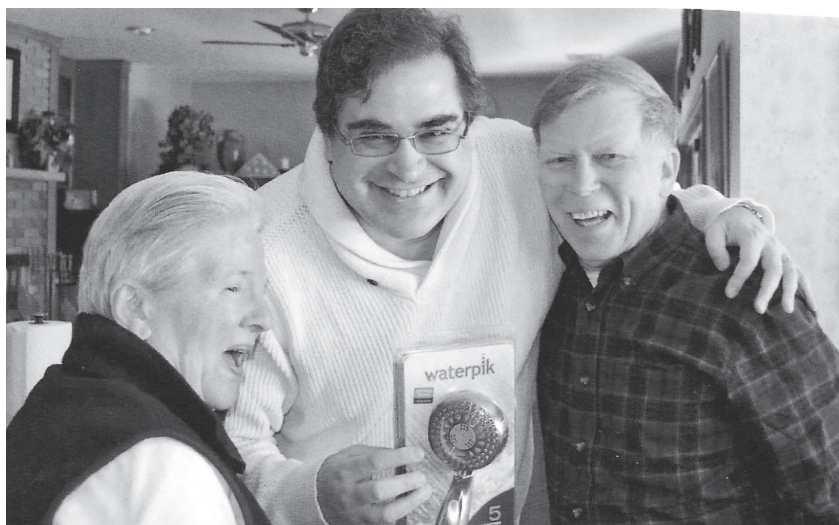
Meg and Marie share a moment together.



Gregg and Brigid enjoying time with their eldest, Drew.



Caroline, Marie, Chris, Elizabeth, and Christopher getting ready to dig in.



Chris with Marie's parents: Claire and Wally Vaughan.



Cousins Meg and Karen keeping in touch.



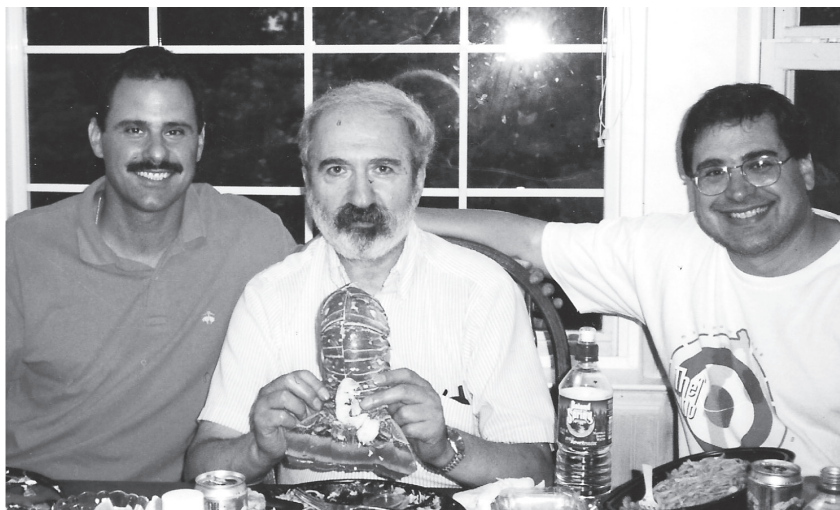
Grandpa Norm thrilled by those loving grandchildren: Christopher, Jared, Drew, Caroline, and Elizabeth.



Chris and Marie with their entire gang: Elizabeth, Caroline, Christopher, Cory.



Grandpa savoring the visit by Chris, Meg, and Gregg, with Caroline “adult sitting.”



Gregg, Dad, and Chris paying reverence to a giant lobster.



Gregg at home
with his favorite:
kibbeh nayee.



Chris and Marie
stepping out.



Lauren, Jared, Gregg, me, Meg, and Donnie in earlier years.

Chapter 13:

The Future's Future

In the previous pages, with the assistance of official records, letters, questions from my inquisitive children, information from other family members, and my own memory, I have attempted to craft together my perception of the long journey that Lizzie Hobbie began in 1901, when she embarked from that small village in Lebanon to Ellis Island in the United States. My goal was to honor my forefathers for their tireless efforts and sacrifice to provide opportunities for those who would eventually replace them in this world. Specifically, I focused on my personal story which is, as it is with my siblings, unique unto itself.

Part of what I hoped to achieve is to create a roadmap that my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren could have available to them. Growing up, whenever I hit a bump in the road in my journey through life, I had to absorb the shock, never having anything I could compare that experience to. I hope that providing numerous life experiences and lessons my descendants can understand that these bumps happen, and that these events too shall pass. Instead of being devastated by events, they will realize it's part of their personal trip... and those that came before them encountered their own bumps to contend with.

A caution for all my personal family who follow me. Just as I am different from the next person, so are each of you. My message is not to be like me. The message is to always be you. No one will know you better than yourself. Try to be true to your values, and always remember, "Winners are losers who get up off the floor." I want to devote some words to my eight grandchildren and my great-grandson. They are not only the future, but they also are the key to the future's future. My great good fortune is that I have lived long enough to know each of them, spend a little time with them, and watch in their maturing

and exploring the horizons of their personal dreams. I wish them all the success...whatever that word means to them...in the world, combined with my endless, unqualified love. Follow your dreams!

Thanks to many thoughts and words contributed by their parents, here they are!

Cory David Attanasio. Cory was born in August 1988 at Norwalk Hospital in Connecticut. He is Marie's son from a previous marriage, and Chris's stepson. He was 4 years old when he entered the Hobbie family. So much energy and curiosity! Born 12 weeks early at only 2 lbs 2 oz, he thrived in the Newborn ICU and came home after only 6 weeks. Cory was an only child until age 12, was a very good-natured child, and made every adventure fun. He loved going to New Hampshire to his grandparents' (Marie's parents') lake house, and also spent time at local video arcades with Chris. Having all of his parents' attention was good, but it is likely he was very happy when sister Elizabeth finally came along!

Cory has always loved computers and video games. He participated in baseball and gymnastics, but eventually realized he did not have a love of sports. In high school he joined the Robotics Club, which was right up his alley. He also found a new passion, theater. He worked behind the stage, but loved the people who gravitate to the arts. They were kind and supported each other like family.

After graduating from Abington Heights High School in 2007, Cory attended Wilkes University in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, for 2 years. He eventually decided that college wasn't for him and went into the workforce where he became a natural salesman. Friendly and knowledgeable, Cory worked hard to get the customers whatever they need. Eventually, he and some friends started their own venture, and opened a Vape shop in Scranton called Union Vapors 570. They all feel a connection to the community. At the store, they work hard to bring in local talent in the form of weekly bands, and to support local artists of many genres (painting, metals, pottery) to help them get noticed. They are also very supportive of military veterans. Cory

is a kind, sensitive soul and puts his heart into everything he does. We are so happy for him and proud for all he has accomplished.

Now Cory is the eldest of my 8 grandchildren. I smile remembering the early 1990s, when I occasionally spent some time with him. His warm smile and clever wit made it fun to be with him.

Andrew Albert Hobbie. Drew was born to Gregg and Brigid in October 1993. I was only 62, so I was a lot more active than I am now. I can still see the anxious look on Brigid's face as she looked at my car, taking her toddler on our first outing to a local playground. He had a ball, smiling continually as he sped down the sliding board into his grandfather's waiting arms at the bottom. We went back to that playground several more times.

From the moment Drew stepped on stage in first grade as the lead in his school play, he knew he wanted to be an actor. His passion for performance and storytelling only grew, and so did his heart. A natural at making and keeping lifelong friendships...some dating back to kindergarten...he also took his role as big brother seriously. He often invented elaborate imaginary games to entertain his younger siblings. I recall visiting them in their Tinton Falls, New Jersey, home, and enjoying all three children in some type of superhero makeshift costumes as they romped in their den. Drew had great compassion and strength that his parents instilled in him. When he was in 5th grade, he courageously intervened in a fight, stopping a group of bullies from hurting a classmate. The boy's mother telephoned to personally thank him.

Drew was accepted into Biotechnology High School, one of New Jersey's top-ranked schools. Even while handling a rigorous academic load, he found time to begin a fencing career. For 4 years he competed and then qualified for the Nationals. Ultimately, he chose to step back in his senior year and focus for a while on an International Baccalaureate program. In between his college years at Ramapo College of New Jersey, Drew took time to work in electronic sales and was ranked among the top sales people in the state. One summer, he

even lived out a childhood fantasy by performing as a knight in the Queen's Court at the New York Renaissance Faire. He continued acting in Shakespeare in the Park and other local productions, eventually deciding to fully pursue his love for theatre with a practical goal of becoming a professor as a backup plan.

Drew graduated from Ramapo, where he met his close friend Julia, a film major who shares his passion for the arts. Together they auditioned for graduate programs across the country, and were accepted into the prestigious Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, Georgia, one of the top acting programs in the world. Now halfway through their MFA program, Drew has taken a special interest in stage combat and fight choreography, blending performance with physical storytelling in bold, dynamic ways.

On a humorous note, a few days ago I received a call from Drew at school in Savannah. I had to grill him to make sure it wasn't a scam because in the past few years I have received many calls purportedly from Drew. They always said they were in jail after being in a bad car accident and would I send them money, keeping it private between us. We both enjoyed a good laugh once I established that this call was from the real Drew.

Taylor Rae Guynn. When Donnie and Meg married in 2010 in Florida, I not only gained a wonderful son-in-law but they added another granddaughter to our growing family. I had visited Meg and Donnie in Gasparilla and had the pleasure of meeting just-turned-14-year-old Taylor. I was astonished at her maturity when we conversed during a long dinner at an excellent restaurant. I left their thinking, "My gosh. She is only 14 and yet so kind, bright, patient, humorous, and thoughtful."

Later I learned that as a child, she played the violin. She displays her creativity in the fine arts, most notably photography, sketching, painting, kiatsugi (a Japanese art form of repairing broken pottery by mending the breakage with urushi lacquer, often dusted with powdered gold or platinum), and computer-generated drawings and

paintings. She was in her high school National Art Honor Society, and graduated with all As and a B+...some fine achievement.

Taylor also found time to apprentice with K.T. Curran in an afterschool program, which exposed her to all aspects of movie production, direction, and participation in group discussions relating to hot topics, social issues for teens. Although Taylor lives in Springfield, Missouri, she occasionally visits Donnie and Meg in Florida. Donnie, Meg, and Taylor celebrate some holidays on family trips all along the East Coast, and at Donnie's family lake house. Meg cherishes the time she and Taylor spend together cooking dinners, coloring Easter eggs, including using them in Easter egg fights, decorating for Christmas, hanging out on Venice Island with berry smoothies, dog walks, and deep, insightful conversations.

Taylor has a Chinese crescent dog named Oggie, which reminds me of a dog story. During a visit to Florida, Taylor stayed at home while Donnie and Meg went out for the evening. When they returned, Taylor told them that Ginger, their dog, had attacked her. She had used makeup and paint to stage a scary scene. When Taylor fessed up, everyone enjoyed a good laugh.

Jared Gregg Christopher Norman Hobbie. Jared arrived on the scene in May 1998, becoming Drew's younger brother. He showed an exceptional mind from the very beginning. Sometimes when I visited his home in Tinton Falls, he would be completely immersed in various electronic games and toys. At the age of 3, he was mastering them all and quite obviously enjoying them. I was in awe watching him navigate those many computer games and solving dinosaur theme puzzles.

Over the years, his intellectual curiosity and focus only deepened. He was accepted into the Academy of Allied Health and Science, a competitive magnet high school that combined rigorous academics with hands-on experience at a local hospital. In high school, Jared stood out not only for his academics but also his leadership. He served as president of both his junior and senior classes, and was also named Junior Prom King. Something I viewed as "above and

beyond,” he studied Latin for 4 years and assisted his Latin teacher as a class advisor. Jared graduated with honors, spoke at his commencement ceremony, and earned college credits through advanced coursework. His SAT scores were exceptional, including a perfect score on one of the subject tests, which earned him multiple full scholarship offers.

He chose to attend Stevens Institute of Technology on a full tuition scholarship as a “Pinnacle Scholar,” a distinction that came with unique academic and leadership opportunities. In his first year he was elected to the Student Senate and spent the summer collaborating with the Maritime Institute and students from other universities on a virtual reality project that scanned ships for hazardous conditions. Throughout his time at Stevens, he also served as a Research Assistant, earning a credit on a published academic article and as a Teaching Assistant. Between his junior and senior years, Jared interned at Morgan Stanley, and he impressed them so much that they invited him to work fulltime during his final year, as he only needed to complete his senior project to graduate.

During college, Jared met Kitty, who would later become his wife. Like so many of my grandchildren, Kitty is an excellent writer. While they were on the West Coast for several years, she would occasionally surprise me with an all-encompassing letter about how they were all acclimating to their different locale, how each member of the family was faring in that new environment.

Even after they relocated to Summit, New Jersey, Kitty still kept me up to date on how each of them was progressing. It’s comforting to know that she, Jared and Albert are handling the changes well, and that they enjoy being near their families again. That includes her parents, Sandy and Joseph, in Brooklyn, New York, where they occasionally visit.

When Kitty was growing up in New York City, she excelled at the piano. At the age of 12, she actually performed in a local restaurant. Kitty is currently working online to obtain a college degree, wanting to be the first member of her family to obtain one.

Jared and Kitty welcomed their son Albert during the height of the Covid pandemic at a time when hospital visits were restricted. Somewhat similar to his grandfather, who moved his family out of state and then returned to the East Coast, Jared accepted a Senior Software Engineer role in Silicon Valley, and the family moved to California. After 2 years, they returned to the East Coast. Jared now works for a prominent company in the Empire State Building bringing the story full circle with both legacy and innovation. Returning to the East Coast was strictly Jared's and Kitty's choice, but his grandfather and both their families haven't stopped smiling since their return.

Elizabeth Anastasia Hobbie. Elizabeth was born in November 1998 in St. Petersburg, Russia. After years of infertility, Chris and Marie decided to adopt, and were incredibly blessed to bring her home in August of 2000. She learned quickly, and her energy and curiosity kept them on their toes! As a child, Elizabeth took lessons in dance and gymnastics as well as soccer. She eventually singled out gymnastics, and for many years dedicated 15 – 20 hours a week to the sport. At Level 7, she became the Pennsylvania State All Around Champion for her age group. Marie and Chris always enjoyed traveling to her gymnastics meets and watching her compete. She also loved the New Hampshire lake vacations and spending time with her cousins. She became an excellent water skier, and is always happy on a boat.

Elizabeth always had a lot of friends and a very active social life. When she was in high school, she became a volunteer fire fighter and studied for her EMT. She loved the fast pace of helping in an emergency situation. She graduated from Abington Heights High School in 2017, and decided to stay local and attend the University of Scranton. She was undecided in a major at that time, but completed her general education credits. Finally she realized that she wanted a career in nursing. This decision came with a necessary transfer to Marywood University, where she completed her studies and earned her Bachelor of Science. She passed her nurse licensing exam in June of 2024 to become an official RN!

If she wasn't already busy enough, Elizabeth also became a Certified Personal Trainer during her college years. Her love of exercise and nutrition made this a perfect choice. She spends many hours at the gym, and has competed in several road races as well as the Philadelphia Half Marathon! She also recently traveled to Florida to compete in a circuit training competition. We are in awe of her energy and love of life! She's always thoughtful and ready to help. Her beauty, kindness, and dedication to everything she does is inspiring and our family couldn't be more proud. Elizabeth is currently working as a RN in the Emergency Department of Lehigh Valley Hospital. We look forward to seeing what else she will decide to take on!

I still recall all those years ago the dilemma I faced trying to find food that the little 2-year-old toddler enjoyed when I occasionally babysat for her. I do remember her avidly and happily devouring some Chinese takeout. She wasn't sure where I fit in her family, and watched me like a hawk. In a split-screen picture in my mind, I can see that wary 2-year-old who had just arrived in America and the confident RN now assisting patients in the Emergency Department of a hospital...and I smile in admiration for that evolution.

Lauren Elizabeth Hobbie. The year 2000 was met in the world... and in the U.S... with great apprehension because the populace was braced for catastrophic occurrences in the money system, computer-driven equipment, and just about every other aspect of life. Many of us, myself included, put aside some cash because we didn't know if ATMs, banks, and other financial institutions would function as the new century began. All the worries were for naught because practically everything worked normally.

However the brightest occurrence in our lives just a few weeks into the new century was the arrival of Lauren Elizabeth Hobbie, the youngest of Gregg and Brigid's children. Just 20 months younger than her brother Jared, she grew up with two older brothers, which kept her on her toes. By the age of 2, she had inherited their fearless spirit and vivid imaginations.

I can attest to the fact that during my visits on those long-ago days, Lauren always made sure she was involved in any actions that involved her brothers. I recall one day, I was reading to Jared and Drew came and sat on my other knee. Within seconds, the beautiful bundle called Lauren came flying through the air, landing on top of us all. We all hugged and giggled as Gregg and Brigid were snapping some photographs.

One memorable day, Gregg said he overheard the kids playing a pretend game and Lauren boldly announced she was going to be Majin Buu, a big, pink, bubble gum-like villain from Dragon Ball Z, who was quite a frightening character. So much for carefully curated age-appropriate content!

Like her siblings, Lauren took swim lessons at her grandfather's urging, who believed all children should learn to swim for safety. But for Lauren it quickly became more than a skill, it was a talent. At the beach club swim league, she consistently dominated her age group, earning countless blue ribbons. She later joined a competitive club team and traveled for meets, excelling especially in the breast stroke and the individual medley. By age 12, she was the top swimmer on the team, and was invited to the championship meet in Hawaii.

Following Jared's path, Lauren attended the Academy of Allied Health and Science High School, and continued to swim competitively through the public school, earning a varsity letter after attending her first four meets. I remember that Lauren was in a competitive meet in the Cranford area during that time. I went over to watch my granddaughter, and it was a beautiful moment for me because I always fought with the water, and to watch Lauren was like watching the difference between night and day.

A gifted writer, Lauren scored an impressive 720 on her English SAT. Although Covid delayed the start of her college journey, she moved to New York City in January 2021 to attend The New School. Despite the isolation of online classes, she embraced city life, living in different neighborhoods and gaining a deep appreciation for the diversity and rhythm of New York City.

Lauren has always had a heart for helping others, especially those with special needs. During her time in the city, she often handed out food and water to those in need. She later became a Registered Behavior Technician, and now dedicates 6 days a week to working with autistic children and adults, bringing empathy, dedication, and purpose to every moment. Although her hours are long, and I imagine often taxing on her, I am sure Lauren feels the joy and elation of helping those who require it.

Christopher Michael Hobbie. Christopher was born in December of 2000 in Bucharest, Romania. The decision to adopt again was an easy one. The adoption agency also had an office in Romania as well as Russia, and Christopher was a perfect fit for the family. We brought him home in December of 2002. The perfect Christmas gift! Christopher was very bright and questioned everything as soon as he could speak some English. Bedtime was always fun, as Mom and Dad were tired and that was when he wanted to know things like, “Why is the sky blue?”

He followed in his sister’s footsteps with gymnastics and soccer, and became very good at both. He competed in gymnastics, traveling for meets in several states, and also continued soccer throughout middle school. Like his older sibling, he also loved all the water activities at the lake house in New Hampshire. In high school, he decided to try tennis, wrestling, and weightlifting. His strength and athleticism made him very good at all of these, and he has many medals to prove it! Competitively, arm wrestling was also fun until he tore his bicep tendon. It was so disappointing as he had trained and studied the sport with the best. Another love for Christopher is cars. Fixing them, driving them, and of course racing them. The local Pocono Raceway has been a fun adventure the past few years.

Christopher graduated from Abington Heights High School in 2019 and headed to Penn State. He majored in business and also added a minor in psychology. It was a difficult road as his was one of the classes that was hardest hit by Covid. Their class moved to

online courses and isolation indoors. Luckily he found the Scranton Penn State campus and thrived, finishing his degree with a difficult 21-credit semester and making the Dean's List! He started his new job as an Area Manager for Amazon in September 2025. We are so excited to see what the future holds for him.

A major characteristic of Christopher is his inquisitiveness about life. On several occasions he approached me and in a very serious tone asked me questions on aspects of life from a much older person's point of view. I was more than happy to share my thoughts with him.

Caroline Elena Hobbie. Caroline was born in Orenburg, Russia, in July 2003. After three children, Chris and Marie still had room in their hearts for one more. They brought her home in March 2005, completing their family. Caroline was a sweet, very active child and never seemed to mind tagging along to all the activities of her older siblings. Eventually she had some hobbies (no pun intended) of her own. She tried the gymnastics route, and competed for several years before deciding she really hated everything except tumbling. That led her to try cheer. After trying football cheer, she decided to join the World Cup and do competitive cheering. She moved up the levels quickly and became a great flyer...the one they throw up in the air! Caroline and Mom enjoyed many trips for the competitions, including Nashville, Atlanta, Dallas, Columbia, Indy, and Orlando for World Championships. Several of her teams were in the top 10 in the country. It was a fun but very challenging time for her. The hours at the gym and the travel were definitely a big commitment. But she loved it and always wanted her team to be the best.

Caroline decided to transfer to the local cyber high school, Commonwealth Charter Academy, after her freshman year. This helped a lot with the cheer travel commitment and was very convenient when Covid hit. She graduated in 2022 and took a year off to consider her options. She worked in retail, and eventually decided to go to school to become an Aesthetician. She always loved skin care, hair products, and nutrition, so it was a natural fit. She passed her licensing exam

in June 2024. It was not easy, and the family was all so proud and excited that day! Caroline has great self-confidence and a lot of big ideas, and we can't wait to see the direction life takes her.

Caroline's beautiful smile and quick repartee always got to me, Grandpa Norm, but none like the one at Ferraro's restaurant on my 80th birthday. After lunch, the family gathered around outside the restaurant for a photograph. In the middle of the group was a giant blown up photograph of me from the year 1955 at the foot of a famous bridge in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi, Japan, where I lived. The contrast between the 24-year-old me in the photograph and the 80-year-old geezer standing with the family could not have been more pronounced. It was then that Caroline shouted, "Look everyone! Grandpa before...and after!" We're all still laughing!



Drew and Julia celebrating their acceptance into the SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) program.



Lauren after finishing her sojourn in New York City.



Gregg breaking bread with Lauren and Drew.



Drew in one of his many acting roles.



Donnie's daughter, Taylor Guynn, and her beloved Aggie.



Taylor with her
wheels.



Chris enjoying his children.



The early years, when Jared, Lauren, and Elizabeth challenged the bars.



Chris and Marie sandwiching Cory as a young adult.



Christopher has multi-talents!



Elizabeth can do rescue work even when she's not in her RN uniform at the hospital.



Wally Vaughan, in the center, flanked by his son Walt, far left, grandson Cory, son-in-law Chris, and son Pat.



Proud Chris and Marie celebrating daughter Caroline's high school graduation.



Grandpa Norm surrounded by some of his beautiful grandchildren.



Photographer Brigid captures her entire family behind 90 Winans Avenue, visiting Grandpa.



Jo got Santa Claus to pose with her growing family on a holiday visit.



Chris and Marie meet Donnie and Meg in Florida, accompanied by some of their family and a tall friend.

Chapter 14:

The Keeper of the Blocks

Albert Jared Song Yi Hobbie

Let's go back to when Albert was born in 2020. It was a few days after his father Jared's 22nd birthday, and Kitty gave him the most precious gift he could have wanted...beautiful Albert. At that moment, Jared and Kitty became parents, Gregg and Brigid became grandparents, and I became a great-grandfather, all for the first time. (Albert, whenever you're reading this, I want you to know the reverberations of your entry into the world.)

Albert, now 5 years old, is already bursting with curiosity, kindness, and charm. With a heart as big as his imagination, he approaches the world with open arms and an eagerness to make friends wherever he goes. He is thoughtful and affectionate, deeply devoted to his family, and has a natural way of brightening every room he's in.

Albert has a remarkable sense of direction, often surprising adults by recalling detailed roadmaps and drawing his own maps from memory. His fascination with how things connect...whether streets, people, or ideas...hints at a beautifully observant and intuitive mind. He spends hours writing, sketching maps, and inventing imaginative stories and adventures. At home, his days are filled with laughter, pretend play, and wide-eyed wonder – there's never a dull moment with Albert around. He's also got the soul of a rock star. With a deep love for '70s and '80s music, Albert can often be found dancing and singing along to classic tunes, adding his own flair with air-guitar solos and spirited moves. His love for rhythm and energy is infectious, just like his laugh.

His parents love teaching him through nature, encouraging him to explore the world by playing in the dirt, going rock hunting, and discovering the beauty of parks and trails. These little adventures have

nurtured his deep appreciation for the natural world and his endless questions about how things work. That is a trait he shares with his grandfather Gregg, who also focused on what makes the merry-go-round turn. Albert's teachers often remark how advanced he is for his age, particularly in his pre-academic skills, something his parents are deeply proud of. But beyond academics, it's his joyful spirit, musical soul, and ever-growing heart that make him truly special.

So, tell me. How does this 5-year-old child garner a chapter in a book all by himself? If I were to ask my great grandson Albert why, I'm not sure he has the perspective to understand why. Let me speak for him now, even though in a couple of years this very bright youngster will be able to handle it alone. As you know, he is the son of Jared and his wife Kitty. That gives him two extremely intelligent roles models to learn from, as well as great genes they have sent his way. I realize it's difficult for me to be objective about Albert. At the moment, it doesn't appear that any of the other 8 grandchildren that I have are headed to an altar to take the vows of marriage. They all seem busy, happy, and coping with this very changed, complicated world in their own fashion...and that is their right, their choice.

Will any of them someday in the future decide that they want to create a family, to become a parent? That decision is solely theirs. Each must plot his or her own route in their journey in life. None of us should in any way try to influence their chosen paths. As Khalil Gibran told us in The Prophet, "You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth." Our job is to be a stable bow so that our children, the arrows, have successful flights. When my grandchildren were toddlers, I invested in a very large box of different-shaped blocks for when they visited me. I sat with them on the living room floor, and we created many kinds of buildings. A few years ago, I gave Albert the entire box because I saw him as the "keeper of the blocks."

I can't help but wonder, a decade from now, will the teenage Albert remember the house at 90 Winans Avenue? Will he recall that when he was 3, he picked peapods from my garden under the

grapevine? Will he remember the box of wooden blocks his father and uncle played with in their visits to my house? I have given the box to Albert for the future for safe keeping. Will he remember that a month ago, during a visit, he took my hand, quickly walked us into the master bedroom, and then leaped on my large, king-size bed, laughing and giggling?

Only time will tell as much more important challenges face him as he acquires the knowledge and skills to navigate the turbulent waters of all his tomorrows. Very likely, based on the laws of probability, he may be fortunate enough to engage with cousins and friends, close and far away, who will enhance his sense of friendship or family. But of course, we're talking about the future, and that, as we know, is unknown, unpredictable, and subject to change.

Growing up in a multi-cultural home – rooted in Chinese, Lebanese, Italian, Irish, and German heritage – Albert is surrounded by stories, traditions, and languages that reflect a beautiful blend of the past and the promise of the future. One day, his mother Kitty will teach him her mother tongue, Chinese, adding to the rich tapestry of his identity.

Albert is already a boy full of wonder, heart, and rhythm – and the world is lucky to have him growing in it.



Albert J. Roeser, Brigid's dad and Albert Hobbie's namesake and great grandfather, served in World War II and took part in the historic Battle of the Bulge near the end of the war. Late in his life, he used to reminisce about the intolerably freezing weather conditions during that crucial Belgium campaign.

I enjoyed many friendly conversations with him over the years.



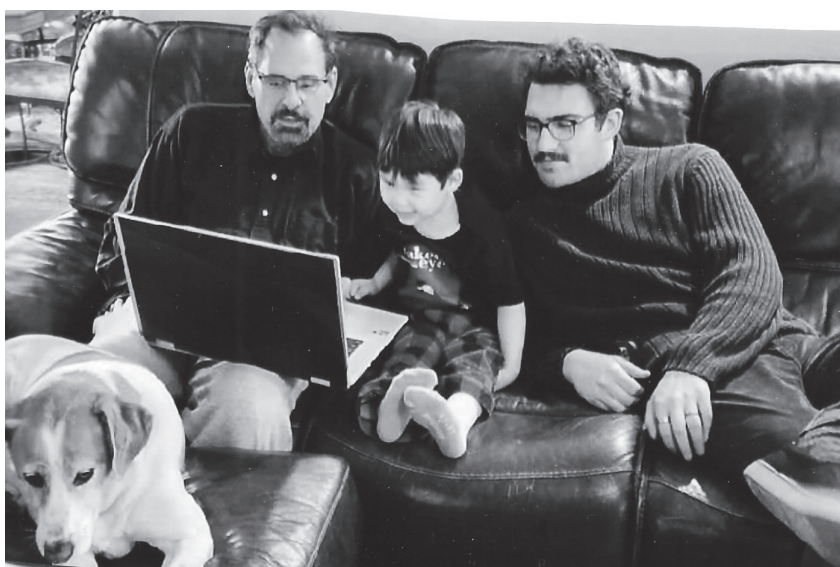
My great-grandson Albert,
visiting 90 Winans Avenue.



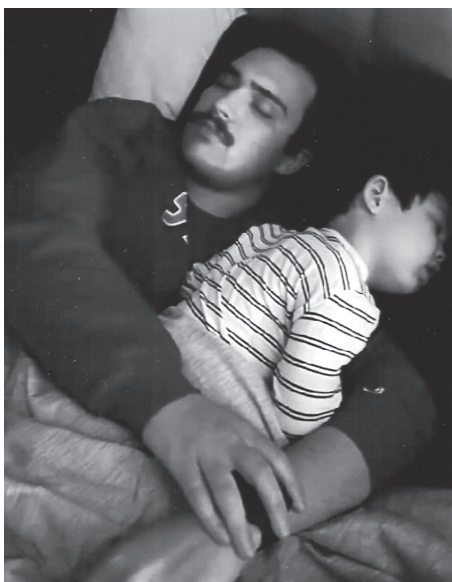
A beautiful family: Kitty, Albert, and Jared.



Jared appears to own the world with his arms around his precious family.



Father, grandson, and son are captured in this relaxing moment.



Is this Jared and Albert, or Gregg and Albert? (I've lived long enough to believe either version.)



Kitty and Jared celebrating the moment.



Jared, Albert, and Gregg take three generations to the carnival.



The smile on Albert's face says it all: The keeper of the blocks is one happy youngster!

Chapter 15:

The Very Complex Me

Early in my life, I discovered Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese poet, philosopher and painter. I was mesmerized by this multi-talented human being, I wanted to know more about him and my fascination with him has never gone away.

I received a huge stimulus when my cousin Harry Calale... his mother Selma was the younger sister of my grandfather Philip Sopp... passed away in 2009. His widow Marian showed me a collection of about a dozen Gibran books and said, "Harry wanted you to have them." When I balked at the surprise gift, she told me that he also said, "He'll appreciate them."

I've read all of the volumes, learning more and more about this exceptional human being. I learned some surprising things because his words are so simple yet powerful he projects a bigger-than-life persona. Actually, he stood 5'3", which is the opposite.

After digesting his many words of wisdom I concluded the following about this extremely sensitive, spiritual person:

"He was an extremely gifted human being who could beautifully express his inner feelings whether with a stroke of paintbrush or the thrust of a pen. I believe his relatively short life was characterized by a combination of forces...both internal and external...which applied constant pressure on his very small, frail physical and sensitive mental structure. He was a man of many moods, and although he appears to be an introvert, he reached out through his art and writing to leave his indelible mark on the world. He had deep feelings and unbridled passion, which never stopped flowing from him until 1931, when he ceased to be. His words more than his paintings have affected millions of people throughout the

world, and the allegorical shadow he cast was far greater than the small shadow of his physically impaired body. Because his works have been translated into many languages throughout the world, I predict that his reputation will eventually receive a second wind and be spread far and wide throughout the ages.”

Most experts believe that “The Prophet” was his best work, and that it was a creation of a lifetime of accumulated love and wisdom, not a fabric of his imagination. From what I’ve read it appears he had a rare friendship with wealthy Mary Haskell, who he met in Boston around 1904. He must have had exceptional faith in her abilities because purportedly he never submitted a line to his publishers without obtaining her final approval. Several of his books were dedicated to M.E.H. (Mary Haskell?) His will bequeathed to her all the contents of his studio.

I am not qualified to explain their relationship, which appears personal and private. Just as I will not try to explain why this Maronite Catholic was also influenced by Islamic teachings. It appears to me that he was very open to new information and from his many exposures to knowledge carved out his own interpretation of his thoughts about the Universe and the Almighty. As a sensitive, gifted writer, he used his brilliant mind to offer advice about the various aspects of life. It’s about his talents and wisdom that I am deeply moved...and it often guides my thoughts and opinions.

Primarily guided and nurtured by an extremely wise grandfather, Giddo Hobbie, and his brilliant son, my father Joseph, with a little help from my sensitive mother, Esther Sopp Hobbie, I grew up trying to fathom the many challenges of a changing world. I wish my error rate could have been lower, but that’s not the way life works. I distinctly recall several events which dramatically changed my view of life.

The first was when I was 4-1/2 years old, and my 9-year-old brother died of rheumatic fever because penicillin had not yet been made available. I recall few details of his passing, but all the emotion

that accompanied it: the home wake, the funeral, the mourning period. They shook me to the core. Especially watching my bereft mother's weeping at her loss. I vividly remember it all!

Shortly thereafter I was getting ready to begin my formal education. That meant following my older brothers to Lincoln School, the grammar school grades K through 6 that was located two blocks away on Centennial Avenue, a major thoroughfare. I was still wearing knickers, those old-fashioned pants that I desperately wanted to outgrow. I'm not sure when that happened, but all of a sudden, I was 5 years old and enrolled in kindergarten. Back then, there was no pre-school or, if there was, our family either didn't know it or couldn't afford it.

When I was 5 years old in kindergarten, life was a maze of confusing thoughts, of coloring books, numbers, easels, different faces and names. It was my first melding pot adventure, kids of all backgrounds were put together. The word "recess" took on a wonderful meaning, and I loved the excitement of new friends. Being selected as one of the kids to go fetch the cases of milk was such an honor, and I remember falling in love with chocolate milk. Through that tiny straw I drained every drop of that sweet liquid in those small cardboard containers!

Then, a year later, I was in first grade, and I recall those scary air-raid drills. Even at the age of 6, I understood that the people in charge of us were incompetent! It was explained that for our protection we were to line up, march into the hallways, where those ceramic tiled walls were met by concrete floors. We were told to lie flat, where the concrete meets the ceramic tiled walls. There was not a time, as I lay there, listening to the sirens blaring, that I didn't think, "What's wrong with these people (adults)? The bombs will fall, the walls will fall on top of us and crush us to death! We should be downstairs in the cellar in a corner someplace! Are they crazy?" I have lived long enough...and the bombs thankfully never came...to learn that those adults knew less than 6-year-old me about how to defend myself from a falling bomb.

Just when I concluded that I had covered everything I want to pass on to my descendants, something occurs like the heavy rain near the end of October 2025. As I sat at the edge of my king size bed in the darkness of this early fall morning, I began to vividly picture a scene from the mid- to late-1930s that occurred at that Lincoln School. During that timeframe, whenever it was raining, my parents' instructions were to not come home for lunch, as we usually did. They said my Mom would pack brown bag lunches for each of us and they would be delivered to our individual classrooms by either the principal or a member of his staff. As I recall, each brown bag contained a sandwich, a piece of fruit, and some of kind cookie or cake. The actual contents are somewhat foggy in my memory. It just occurred to me, were Eddie and Bobbie, who later attended the same school, similarly indulged?

Taking the time on November 5, 2025, I called Ed, and here's what he told me. Number 1, by the time Ed and Bob were at Lincoln School, Essie had the foresight to send the boys with their brown bags when they left for school early in the morning. He added that if it snowed, Giddo would put Ed and Bob on a sled, cut through the fields behind the garages, and pull that sled up the very steep Thomas Street hill into Lincoln School. (I forgot to ask him if he would fetch them home by the same method.)

I recall seeing Giddo carrying the big package with our lunches, trudging slowly under a large black umbrella those few long blocks to the school. Somehow I thought he had cut through the fields, which did not contain homes in that time period, as a short cut to the school. I have mixed memories – sometimes I recall him on the main road and sometimes cutting through the fields.

Only now do I reflect on the immense love that Giddo and Mom, the sandwich maker, showed to their much-loved children and grandchildren because they didn't want to expose us to the harsh elements. I never before thought of the time and effort each expended so that we could remain dry and warm in our comfortable school. Like the Lone Ranger, neither one of them remained around...or expected..."thank you" from my brothers and me.

From first grade to fifth grade when I became 9, I recall how we kids ruled Winans Avenue, the street. One thing I never did understand was when you crossed the main thoroughfare, the extension of Winans Avenue was called North Lehigh Avenue...it never made sense. Both sides should have had the same name, not two different names for the same street.

Anyway, Winans Avenue was only partially paved, probably half way, and the rest of it served as our baseball field. However, periodically cars would come in from Centennial Avenue using Winans as a short cut to South Avenue, one of the major roads in Cranford and other nearby towns. Each time a car came our way, our ballgame had to be halted but at a price. We shouted, cursed, screamed at the drivers, telling them to stay off our ballfield and made their passage uncomfortable for them. That only lasted a few years because eventually the entire street was paved, traffic increased substantially, and shouts gave way to dirty looks and waving to clear the traffic through our ballfield.

When I was about 11, I was walking to the local grocery store for my mother, and was staring down at the sidewalk as I stepped on a few ants. I realized, I killed those tiny ants, took their lives, and thought, "I don't want to die like that. I don't want to be just another ant. I want to be different. I don't want to be like everybody else." I noticed almost everyone I knew was right-handed with a southpaw here and there. So I began using my opposite hand as much as I could: to eat, to bat lefty, to hook a basketball lefty. To this day, I eat with either hand, but eventually went back to my natural side of being right-handed. As part of the transition, my best friend, the late John Bilney, convinced me to stop playing a mediocre game of table tennis and switch to right-handed, where I eventually played very well.

I was alarmed to discover that I was moved to tears when I experienced something poignant or heart-wrenching. I always tried to hide it because I felt it was a weakness since I was taught that big boys don't cry. During the same period in my early teens I realized that I

had an extremely sensitive stomach that didn't like any kind of travel except on foot or bicycle. When I was placed in a car, a boat, a train, a Ferris Wheel, somehow my automatic swallowing of saliva stopped and my intestinal system got messed up. Whenever I reached my destination, people would always say to me, "Are you OK?" Because I had a greenish pallor on my face. You need to understand that many different pressures were working on me during this period of my youth. Here I was, living in Cranford, New Jersey, a nice town of about 20,000 people, trying to fit in, but wincing each time I would hear comments about me being an A-rab when I wanted to fit in like all of my classmates

As a 15-year-old, I was now a delivery boy/soda jerk at a local pharmacy, but I had a long way to go. I definitely was wet behind the ears, and somewhat gullible. I was confused by three successive lies, which I initially accepted as being true. Two actually occurred while I was still in 6th grade. Seth Weekly was the elderly coach of most sports and gym classes in all the Cranford public schools. One exciting game was called bombardment. A medicine ball was thrown at you, and if it hit you, you were eliminated. The last kid standing was the winner. It was much larger than a basketball. One day Mr. Weekly told me that this large ball could fit through a regular basketball hoop. I told him that it was impossible because of its large size. He proceeded to tell me that when the ball was shot at the basket, the higher it went the smaller it became and eventually when it reached the basket it would fit. Even though he didn't illustrate it, his manner was so persuasive I believed it until years later when I realized he was pulling my leg.

The second lie was when I was in the Trinity Church choir when I was about 9 years old. The minister told us that Jesus resided in the altar box where all the holy rituals were performed. No one ever told me differently, until one day years later I thought, "That can't be because there are millions of altars in churches all over the world." The minister had meant it figurately, but at the time this naïve religious kid took him literally.

I guess I was still naïve at 15 when I was hired at Seager's Drug Store in Cranford. I was sent to stores all over town asking owners for a sky hook that Albert my boss told me to get on my first day of work. Finally one kind proprietor said, "Hey kid. They're having fun with you. There's no such thing as a sky hook."

During this growing-up period of my early life, many competing pressures were having their fun with me. As far as my spiritual evolution, that was very traceable. As a 10-year-old, I was a choir boy at Trinity Episcopal Church in Cranford. Under the strict guidance of the choir master, my brother Ernie, Nemo Koury, and I marched down the aisle on Sundays and practiced two nights a week. We sang in the choir until basketball overrode religious duty...I'm not too proud of how we conned my father into making that fair decision. Back to the church and choir. Sitto always attended the 11:00 a.m. Sunday service, all dressed up and sitting by herself in the back. I believe she walked there all alone; I don't recall anybody driving her. Sitto was the religious power in the family, constantly telling us to pray to God and to be good. She had a mini altar on the dresser in her bedroom, where she did her most important prayers and her frequent discussions with God. Whenever we were away at college, the military, etc., she stressed the importance of prayer and the need to go to church. Almost every letter from home repeated that same message.

I used to go to chapel in the Service because that message followed me all the way to Japan. At D&E College, chapel was mandatory, which meant going to church once a week to hear a very long, boring lecture. Staying awake was truly a challenge, which I often lost. In Japan, every week a pastor from a different denomination would officiate at the base chapel that I attended. That is, until I had my spiritual awakening. One week the pastor was a person we called the "Holy Roller," and he belted the congregation with fire and brimstone, screaming from the altar for us to come up and be saved. As he slowly walked down the center aisle, I can still see him, arms outstretched, shouting his bombastic message, and several servicemen ran up to him and fell on their knees, weeping. When he

reached me, in a nearly empty row, he correctly read the look on my face and kept walking.

That was my last visit to church except for weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc. You might say that was my turn-off. I henceforth viewed clergymen, who I previously thought had an in with God, as people who majored in religion, not English like me. They all lost their special relationship to God. I then began periodically to attend Shinto, Buddhist, and other religions to kind of check them out. Khalil Gibran helped me out in those days, and from a combination of religious and spiritual messages, from reading, I reached my own conclusions. For a while, I became an atheist. And then, because I believed there was “something,” I became an agnostic. Now I feel there is a spiritual force that is present, and each denomination sees or perceives it through their own eyes.

My entire life I wrote poetry, sometimes to explain myself or express my feelings, and at other times as an escape mechanism from the reality I didn't like.

Before I continue with my overview of growing up in this hard-working family, let me share one of the reasons I enjoy living in the house that I grew up in. A few minutes ago, I went into my mother's pantry, where her aprons still hang. For a split second, I was 9-year-old Norm looking at the no-longer-there row of drinking glasses that lined the second shelf. It was a split-second event, but it touched me deeply.

As the years went by, and I gained confidence in handling situations that confronted me, I tended to shy away from loud, noisy commotions. Life was much more pleasant when I removed myself from those boisterous voices. The bar scene never appealed to me, and I avoided being involved in it. I know I was very happy when my younger brothers were born. For the remainder of my teens, when I went to Homer or Cortland for much of the summer, I gravitated to those cousins who were gentle and soft-spoken, and tried to avoid those who weren't. I seemed to have followed that pattern for the rest of my life.

I believe I'm somewhat like my Dad. He enjoyed subtle humor, and I find that I like the implied more than the stated. I like Jerry

Seinfeld because he was low-key and used implied humor. He allowed your brain to figure out why something was funny. At family gatherings, I used to like to sit next to Pop, Giddo, Eddie or Bobbie. A lot had to do with what was going on in my life at the time because I would try to get information and feedback from people I respected and trusted.

Through my public-school years, I inched ahead slowly learning about myself. I worked hard enough to average Bs in my scholastic endeavors. I had limited success playing basketball and baseball, and led a fairly restricted social life. I dated often, but rarely with the same person because I didn't understand what I wanted. I had yet to understand that it needed to be a connection, not a trophy. Occasionally an event from long ago works its way into my now-sphere, and I recall an event, a story, a lesson about life that I want to pass on to my descendants.

I was in college in the early 1950s, working at a restaurant in Seaside Heights, New Jersey, for the summer. A buddy and I lived in a motel, rent free, and worked as busboys/dishwashers at a very nice boardwalk restaurant. In lieu of paying rent for our windowless motel room (just a ceiling transom that had to be closed when it rained), once a week we had to change the bed linen in every motel room. Also, at the restaurant, we had one meal plus snacks and thanks to a generous chef, who was attending Trenton State Teachers College, we ate extremely well. There were probably 10 waitresses who also made sure that my buddy and I had plenty to drink and eat.

Now for the life lesson I learned from that job at the Shore. I was very attracted to one of the pretty waitresses, but she was the girlfriend of "Apollo." He was 6'4", had the body of a male model, blond curly hair, and movie-star handsome! He swam like a fish, and had it all. King of the beach! Skinny me wanted to have everything he had, including his girlfriend. Talk about envying someone. One day the girlfriend asked me to go with her in the car and help her pick up some supplies for the restaurant. We had just turned the corner from the restaurant when she pulled the car over to the curb, shut off the

engine, and began professing her love for me. To say I was surprised and shocked is an understatement. I kept looking out of the car windows to see if someone we knew was able to hear her confession. After getting over my initial reaction, we talked calmly and agreed to stay in touch. That fall I went away to college in West Virginia, and she corresponded with me. I used to show my college friends her beautiful photograph, telling them that she was my girlfriend. When I returned home from college at the end of the semester, I drove down to the Shore and was very surprised to see that she was still working at the restaurant, married to “Apollo,” and expecting a child. Talk about a roller-coaster ride! The moral of the story is: Do not envy anyone. Be happy with whatever you have. Because at least in this case, skinny me had won over “Apollo.”

I believe I was fortunate in life because when I lived in Fanwood, I was attended to by a doctor whose philosophy was “everything in moderation.” I also attribute my long life to just good fortune, good genes, and perhaps my life-long dislike of gristle and fat. So over a lifetime I have put very little of that in my body. My stomach bothered me a lot in my younger years, probably because of stress and sometimes just pigging out. For many years I drank a few ounces of aloe vera every day, which seemed to soothe my digestive tract. Other times I drank Cheribundi, which also seemed to help.

I told my children to always walk around slowly after exercising in order to give your heart rate time to decrease slowly. Never sit down when you’re huffing and puffing, and also never jump into a cold shower when you’re hot and sweaty. I know two people who died after having done that and the doctor told me that it was too much for their hearts to accommodate that sudden and drastic change in temperature. A few times, when I was very tired, I just stopped what I was doing and napped 30 minutes. I woke up refreshed and feeling much better. As my Dad used to tell me, “You’re the best doctor. Listen to what your body is telling you.” In other words, don’t push it if you’re feeling real tired. Give yourself the opportunity to recharge your batteries.

Junior College and Davis & Elkins College were just more of the same...still searching. All this time I became more comfortable in my own skin, gaining confidence in my limited abilities. What helped me was that I partially succeeded in becoming a big fish in a small pond because I was a kid without much confidence. I can trace how it all progressed. In Lincoln Grammar School, I learned to excel in flipping cards and playing marbles. I always beat my classmates and then sold them the cards and marbles back. Eventually I would repeat the process. The same kind of thing happened in junior high school, high school, junior college and college. I was always a big fish in a small pond, whether it was sports, clubs, offices, poker playing, etc. And with each ego-rewarding experience, my confidence grew. When I got to the Army (CIC) and then Western Electric, and later colleges, all very large ponds, my confidence had grown enough for me to handle the added pressure in every job for the next 66 years. At Western Electric, I eventually became the right-hand-man for the most powerful person at each location...which gave me much greater overall influence than my actual position warranted. I never wanted to be the big fish but I wanted to be able influence where it swam.

In 1968, when I began my 23-month tour as head of Western Electric's Speakers Bureau, a baffling but educational event occurred. It happened several months after the unexpected death of my father, which had been a terrible blow. A fellow department chief at Western Electric came into my cubicle and angrily said, "Are you for real?" I was puzzled as to what he meant, and continuing he said, "You're nice to everybody." That floored me because I assumed people accepted me at face value. I've tried to live by the Golden Rule to treat others as I would like to be treated. A few months later, I was promoted to Assistant Manager for the Safeguard Project in Greensboro. That same department chief was furious because he had wanted that job. Several years later he, too, was promoted to Assistant Manager in headquarters public relations. Afterwards we had a casual relationship, never once discussing the earlier conversations. I dwelled on his cold remarks briefly, decided it was his problem, and off-loaded its content.

I've spoken of my 3 years in Greensboro and the remainder of my 33 years with Western Electric previously, so let's turn to my next career, teaching at three different New Jersey colleges. Because I really got to know my material, those two years in the Speakers Bureau prepared me for life. And I enjoyed teaching another 33 years before the pandemic and failing eyesight brought that to an end. I loved my work, I enjoyed almost all of my students, and I was a happy camper. I learned a lot more about life, and will try to crystallize some thoughts that I want to pass on to my beautiful descendants.

I wish each and every one of them, those I know well, those I don't see as often as I wish, and those that haven't been born yet great happiness and good health.

What have I learned in my 94 years? A lot but not enough. Because as my high school chemistry teacher told me as I shared a learning experience with him, "Young man. You will discover that the more you learn, the more you realize how little you know."

In no specific order, I have selected the following observations of what I learned as journey markers for your review. It's your choice. Learn from them, ignore them, experiment with them. Your choice. I just want to relate them to you. Any action will be only as you deem appropriate.

I was asked what I should save from a fire besides myself. My first reaction was my wallet and credit cards. But after weighing the question carefully, I ended up with the many old photographs of my family, the old irreplaceable ones of my ancestors at different ages and the newer ones of my children and their families at different ages. Those images give me the greatest pleasure and stoke the memories of countless events in their evolving lives. They can't be replaced. Of course the reason it also has to be myself is that if my life stopped, these thoughts would have no place to go.

When it comes to my creativity, I don't really have any control over it. If I dwell on an issue long enough, my subconscious kicks in and I'm sorting out possible solutions. It's never from directions I give to my brain.

I believe tradition plays the role in our lives because it explains our behavior. We do things a certain way because that's how we were taught to do it. Gardening, for example. Ed, Bob, and I traditionally do gardening very much as we were taught by my father and grandfather during our youthful years. We feel good modeling their teaching within our own family units. That's one way that tradition impacts our daily lives. Essie also set a good example. Eddie told me she used to read and write letters to and from the many servicemen on our block because their parents were not able to do so on their own. Of course each of our minds and thinking play a role in what we do. Self-concept is what we know about ourselves, self-esteem is how we feel about what we know about ourselves. It begins when you are born, and is affected by everything you experience throughout your life. So depending on how nature and nurture deal out experiences to you, that's how both play a role in developing one's self-esteem.

My most cherished possession is my brain...my mind. It is inquisitive, imaginative, creative and grateful for the life it has given me. I am fulfilled by the simplest of things. I enjoy art, music, theater, sports, nature, beauty in all its forms, the mystery of the universe to the creation of human kind.

Periodically, events occurred in my life that completely baffled me. For example, here I am approaching 95 years old and I suddenly remembered a cluster of memories that were paramount in my developing 6 – 8 year old brain of the late 1930s! They came from out of the blue, like a bolt of lightning. Nothing preceded them, but they began with a word...a name...and a face.

Over the next few days, more details filled in the picture, completed the memory piece, in other words, once again I lived long enough for whatever my brain was researching to surface and confront me with questions and memory bits.

Perhaps you remember the corner house on Winans Avenue where it meets Centennial Avenue...the one with those fabulous, large cherry trees? During most of my childhood, that house was owned by the Sheik El Khouri. However, prior to them, when I was

about 4 or 5, the Ganem family lived there for a number of years. I recall three specific members of that family, who relocated ostensibly because of the approaching world war, which was beginning to ignite the entire world. The key person was the mother...and her name was the word that emerged from its long dormant place, hidden in the recesses of my subconscious.

As I was oblivious to the pending data, I suddenly thought, “Nabeehah,” and visualized the soft-spoken, fairly short mother who often visited our home and was a close friend of my mother Essie. I vaguely remember this gentle person, who was very well liked by my mother, each being very ladylike and respectful to one another. I also began to recall a George Ganem, a year younger than me, and his older brother Fuad (Fred), a year older than me. The image of the family’s father George was hazy at best, and I believe he would periodically go to a job in Phoenix, Arizona, for long periods of time.... And then, just like that, they were all gone, never to return to Winans Avenue. For a while, I held out hope that my friend Fuad, my playmate, would return to Winans Avenue. There is a glimmer of a memory that when my father passed away many years later, Nabeehah, who had kept up correspondence with my mother, visited us during my mother’s bereavement.

Did she really visit us in 1969? Or how much of it dwelled in the imagination of that 5-year-old who didn’t want to lose such a good friend? I recently looked them up online and found that the family had flourished and expanded greatly, and that George, the last of the family that I knew, passed away in 2022.

Now that I found out that the father, George, and the memorable Nabeehah had both passed away, I also learned that my friend Fuad is also gone. So although I learned that there were many offspring from their family still living in the Phoenix area, none of the new family had ever lived on Winans Avenue. Which means that my fleeting memory of the Ganem family was just that...a brief visit from my very distant past, which resolved itself decades later, leaving me with only fond memories of days gone by.

You must know, though, that not everything that comes from your brain, your self-talk, is positive. Sometimes it leads you to subjects that bother you terribly. For example, take racism. I saw it while growing up and thought it was unfair. I realized it was perpetuated because of the perception of others, among other reasons. When I lived in Japan, I learned to see the world through different lenses and realized that a human being is a human being, all having similar traits, emotions, desires, goals, etc. That's helped me to figure out how I fit into this world. Later, teaching numerous classes of "Dynamics of Communications" (interpersonal relationships) also helped me to see the world more objectively. I believe a man who is kind, caring, warm, sincere, a good listener, an engaging smile, confident, and comfortable in his own skin is likeable. A woman with similar traits is also likeable. In both cases, a nice hair style and healthy-looking body add to their likeability – even if they shouldn't.

What builds me up mentally? Getting good sleep and fresh air. Doing things, being physically active. Emotionally, when I'm communicating with my loved ones, that they're happy in their lives. Physically, when I'm walking outdoors a lot and roaming my yard, just putting around. Spiritually, when the world doesn't have too many issues to solve. The opposite, that which wears me down, fatigues me, is when none of these enjoyable activities occur or there are problems in my loved ones' lives...or when there are consecutive days of inclement weather that confine me to the indoors.

While I do believe that fate sometimes intervenes in our lives, my view is that each of us creates our own destiny. That's why I always encourage you to follow your dreams, goals, and aspirations. In my mind, it's not crucial that I get base hits when I'm at bat. But what is important is that I have an opportunity to come to the plate. If I don't practice, become skilled, educated, learned, I won't be chosen to come to the plate. And that's why we should all strive to prepare ourselves for the opportunity to have an at-bat.

To continue the baseball metaphor, during my life I enjoyed many sports. I practiced as often as I could, trying to improve my

skills. I enjoyed marbles, baseball, basketball, ping pong, tennis, and softball. I had some success and some failure in my undertakings.

To free up time for these pleasures I had to do a certain number of chores, contributing to the success of the family. Studies and other responsibilities also took up much of my time. But I had a choice... and was given a chance to follow my dreams.

Take my brother-in-law Vic Manisera and my cousin George Hobbib. As older sons in immigrant families they were never given a choice. They were compelled to work after school to earn money and contribute their wages for the survival of their family. They had no opportunity for sports and other activities even though both would have excelled. In other words, they were not allowed to pursue their dreams, goals, or aspirations.

Before leaving the topic of sports, there is something I want to include in the book because I have watched it with a smile on my face for many decades. I love to watch sports contests, especially football, basketball, and baseball at various levels. There are a few other sports I enjoy, but mainly those three. In addition to the games or contests and the excitement of highly achieving individuals or team efforts, I never cease being fascinated by the officiating. Often outstanding, occasionally not.

But there is one call that stands alone in its accuracy. And that is in football when a high punt sales out of bounds and an official picks up the ball, walks quickly up the sideline and places the ball on a specific yard line signaling for the game to continue. I cannot tell you the number of times I have smirked because in my mind there's no possible way to know where that high-sailing football crossed the out-of-bounds line.

Yet I have not once seen an official hesitate to quickly mark the pigskin at a specific yard marker. I have to believe that they all have been taught to act decisively and that nobody will ever question it. And that's what they all do.

Getting back to our individual achievements during our lives, each one of us owes our ancestors...a reason for being...a full measure

to become everything we can in whatever number of years we have been given. To me, the saddest story I can hear is of the person who completely wastes their life, only taking up space, following orders, and not taking one step outside the narrow corridor for only showing up for life. I can look over my shoulder of the thousands of people I have met in my lifetime and tell you about most of them: The few who “went for the gold” and the large number who “only took up space.” I am more than thrilled that my three children all went for the gold. I couldn’t ask for more.

I was asked, “What is the perfect age to be?” And I recently told my son Chris, “I would love to have my 22-year-old Army body when I was Superman, but I wouldn’t trade my old brain and the experiences of my entire life for anything.” I empathize with what young people are going through as they struggle to determine who they are and what they want to be. Most of them don’t understand that their self-talk is just their own brain struggling with the unknown aspects of an inquiring mind. As you grow older, you usually get to realize that self-talk is not always positive. You must learn to talk back to it and have the final word. It’s when you don’t, that you have troubles.

If I could go back to any age, I would only do so for a given moment. I am very comfortable in my skin. I am happy with almost all of my life experiences, the wonderful family I have, and my current stage of life. I view the world through 94 years of experiences, the majority of which have been rewarding. It would be unfair to “cherry pick” and say that I’d like to have my 22-year-old body unless I was willing to accept the emotional and psychological insecurity that went with it. The wisdom of age and its growth experiences are irreplaceable, as is the comfort of understanding and coping with one’s self-talk. In exchange, though, one has to live with an ever-aging body and dwindling cognitive abilities. The rewards are worth it!

I wouldn’t trade my experiences, knowledge, wisdom or family for anything that came before. The early days, when my children were growing up were wonderful and unforgettable, but they can’t

compare with where they are now while still traveling on their life's journeys. It's beyond my wildest dreams and expectations. If it's a choice between my mind and my body, I will take a sound mind every time. (Now if you really want to see me hesitate for a moment in my choice, offer me my taste buds completely back, having lunch with my children sharing a chateaubriand. Then you'll see if I can walk the talk!)

When it comes to me wanting to be the smartest, richest, most creative, the answer is definitely: the kindest. There's much to be said about the other states of being, but I believe a person who is kindest would be happy most of the time, feel good about themselves, have very few downs in their life, and have very little to worry over. As attractive as those other categories are, I truly believe they could cause you a great deal of stress.

When asked if I prefer talking or listening, my response is: It depends on the situation, my goals, my knowledge, the other person, etc. If it's an area where I consider myself somewhat of a subject matter expert (dynamics of communication; public speaking; the strategies of baseball, football, and basketball), I tend to want to speak more to sell my ideas or thoughts. If I don't know much about the subject being discussed, I want to listen carefully, so that I can learn.

At a young age, I was reluctant to put myself out there. When I got older, I was apt to talk to strangers. In my old age, it's back to my mood and the occasion. Sometimes I can be very open, other times like a clam. If you want to better understand how and why we do this, you need to look at the Johari Window concept. It was something I taught in my "Dynamics of Communication" class, and it explains what opens us up and shuts us down.

My daughter recently asked me if we had a family crest. I told her, "If there is one, the family has conspired for 94 years to keep that information hidden from me. If there is a crest, it's probably a garlic clove!"

Before we go further, I would like to toss out several thoughts for you, the reader, to consider. Don't let anyone define who you are.

That's your job. Secondly, don't anyone diminish you. Remember Eleanor Roosevelt's words that no one can make you feel inferior without your permission. (You can't stop what people say, but you don't have to buy into it.)

I was recently asked, would I prefer to be respected or liked. My response was, "Why not both?" And if I can't have both, I'll settle for respected because that's a close cousin to fairness. When It comes to the soul of a human being, I believe it's in the brain because it has to do with feelings, which require participation of the brain. When you die, the brain no longer functions. Therefore, you no longer have feelings or a soul. (To repeat this memory, when my grandfather Giddo died, I wanted to kiss him goodbye because he meant so much to me. Because it was several days after his death during the wake that I was absolutely shocked to feel that I was kissing a slab of marble, which was ice cold and devoid of any human warmth.) I was asked, "Why are we born?" And my answer was, "It's to continue our species, to perpetuate humankind. Without our birth, humankind would become extinct like the dinosaurs."

I am not holding on to anything that prevents me from obtaining serenity, security, and freedom. I experience what I can of these states of being, based on that which is occurring in the world, in my country, and in my personal life. It varies from time to time, and on occasion, "my cup runneth over," and other times, "pickings are lean."

Balancing security with exploration and growth depends on whether you are talking globally or personally. From a global point of view, our country must remain strong and well-prepared for any eventuality. We should also be exploring both outer space and artificial intelligence. From a personal point of view, I believe one should focus on solidifying your basis of financial security but earmark a small percentage of your assets for exploring other revenue-creating ventures. Above anything else, you need to have fun and learn to metacommunicate and take time to smell the roses on a continuing basis.

When it comes to mental and emotional growth, one should strive to become all you are capable of achieving while making sure

you don't lose the common touch. As you can imagine, there's a lot of room for interpretation in all of these words.

I want to comment on someone I considered to be an American hero, John McCain. He had to deal with many difficult circumstances, and I rank him high because of the splendid character of the man. He went against the wishes of his political party to help defeat a major bill he thought was not good for the country. It was not easy, and he was condemned for it, but in my mind he stood very tall. I was also proud of him while he was running against Barack Obama for president. During a debate, he was talking to a supporter in the audience, who made a nasty comment about Candidate Obama. He could have allowed that comment to stand, and feed the frenzy of the audience, but his character showed. He corrected the woman by saying something to the effect that Obama was a good human being, but they differed on important issues.

I personally believe those long years of imprisonment and severe torture added to factors that shortened his life. What a noble thing he did during his captivity. The North Vietnamese, after several years, offered to send him home as a gesture to his father, a Navy admiral. McCain refused unless the other American prisoners would also be released. His captors were furious, and made sure his subsequent years of captivity were served with more intense torture. As one who has minor issues with his shoulder when putting on shirts or jackets, I winced with empathy whenever I watched him struggle with his coats. He suffered to the end with extreme pain and immobility of his shoulders because of the prolonged inhumane methods of torture. I believe he would have been a very fine president if elected.

What are the three things a person should do before they die? Naturally it varies with each person. For me, I want to become all that I can in this very wonderful life I was given. I want to slake my thirst for life to feel happy, alive and fulfilled. And lastly, I want to pass on what I've learned to those I leave behind...help them to be prepared for what they will experience as they grow and eventually

age. If I can accomplish these three goals, then I will close my eyes for the last time completely at peace with myself.

The reason why I want to be cremated, and my ashes scattered in the ocean is summed up by something J. F Kennedy said in 1962. "All of us have in our veins the same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean. And therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean, and when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch it, we are going back from whence we came."

Returning once again to my work career, the characteristics I value most in my co-workers are being goal-oriented, time-focused, and teamwork-conscious. I like it when they are serious when it calls for seriousness or laugh when it's OK to be humorous. What irritates me is when people mix up those two styles. My most aggravating time with my subordinates is when I anticipate a problem, provide specific instructions to them as to how to avoid the problem, and then they later tell me that the issue got screwed up. When I ask them if they followed my instructions, they turn red and say, "No." That has happened more times than I care to remember. It's always frustrating because not once do they have a reason for not following my instructions.

I have used numerous emotional methods throughout my life to deal with challenging issues. I try to distract my mind with something enjoyable or rewarding. If I feel a low, I'll reward myself with a great meal, reading from a favorite book, watching a fun TV program, doing a crossword puzzle, playing solitaire, playing Scrabble, taking a walk, enjoying my garden and nature, watching construction workers (like the house that was recently rebuilt across the street), calling friends and always enjoying our conversations, daydreaming about my children and peeking in on their beautiful lives as they keep enriching one another, etc., etc.

I use these very same tools when I'm dealing with anger, frustration, disappointment, excitement, criticism, joy, praise, rejection, and success. I try not to allow myself to get too high or too low

knowing that it's only temporary. Most of all, I handle my self-talk (that voice in your head) by not letting it run the show. If it's positive, I think, "Easy does it, Hob, Easy does it." I don't want to get carried away by praise, flattery, adulation, success, etc. And if it's negative, I tell it to go away. And no matter how often it returns, I tell it, "You're wasting your time because I don't listen to this voice." The self-talk eventually realizes that I'm not buying into what it's trying to sell me.

In this various complicated world, how can we determine what is true? Strive to listen to many points of view. When an event occurs, quickly watch CNN and Fox News to see how it is covered. I try to do that and am constantly shocked at how we're living in two different worlds. It breaks my heart to see our country so divided. I worry most for my descendants because my time will be short, but they hopefully have decades ahead of them.

Part of your personal truth will most likely have to do with how you want to perceive the world and how you have been conditioned to see and understand it. None of us is in the position to say, "I'm right on this issue." We just have to respect the other person's right to see things differently than we do. It's not easy!

I want to pass along some things I've learned in my 94 years.

- We're not entitled to anything in life; we have to work for it.
- After you have a job, it rarely matters where you went to school...very few people ask (I graduated from a very, very small college you probably never heard of. During my 33 years in a major corporation, I had graduates from Ivy League and other major universities work for me...it never, ever mattered.)
- What does matter is your work ethic and your positive attitude.
- If you are miserable in your work, your life, then make a change. But make sure you have another job before you give notice. "Telling off" your boss before you leave may ensure that down the road you may regret those words. Don't needlessly burn your bridges.

- Don't waste any time in your life complaining and whining... it's unproductive use of your time because most people can't stand to listen to constant whining, don't like whiners, and don't really care about your message.
- Remember that what you do every day is what your life is all about. (There's no pot of gold at the end of your life.)
- And because wisdom comes in many and often unexpected forms, a fortune cookie taught me this." Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood."
- Finally, always remember that life is a journey. Enjoy every step along the way!

When I think about human behavior there are very few things that totally surprise me except for one. First of all, I need to explain that I believe the gift of life is the most precious gift any of us can receive. And secondly, to be blessed with a reasonably healthy body, free of debilitating diseases or handicaps, is something else for which one should be grateful.

That's why this one issue really irritates me. I am aware of our current laws which state that a driver must defer to a pedestrian crossing the street. In spite of that protection, how can individuals, usually reading their smartphones or any of their electronic gadgets of 2025, put their heads down and completely ignore the vehicles when they walk across a thoroughfare? They are leaving their fate solely in the hands of someone sitting in the driver's seat of a powerful automobile, capable of maiming, severely injuring, or removing their precious gift of life.

Think about this, Suppose the driver is distracted by a passenger in the car or is vehemently arguing with another passenger. Suppose the driver is bitten by a bee or suffers a heart attack or any other physical or mental occurrence. You are going to gamble your precious life on the hope that nothing interferes with that driver keeping you safe? You are positive that you won't become a statistic because society has rules that should be followed.

For the many of you following that unexplainable course...and defying the odds of possibility...I hope that one of the following phrases is not inscribed on your gravestone.

“But I had the right of way!” or

“What were the chances the driver would have a heart attack at that moment?” or

“A better driver would have reacted more quickly.”

My overarching goals as a father were to be a good father to my children, providing a decent life for my family as they grew up, to teach them good values, to allow them to evolve into the best human beings they could be, to have them treat others fairly, with understanding and compassion, and most of all to know that I would always be there for them, and for them to be proud of me for standing up for that which I believed in.

There are still many questions that I ponder, and I’m still a work in progress. However, the telephone just rang here in mid-November 2025, and it was my younger brother Ed. He was calling from his beautiful Shore home on Long Beach Island in New Jersey, and was in the process of winterizing the home for the coming weather. Ed is in an interesting position. He works two or three days a week in the very successful law practice that he and his son Mark have built in Cranford. I would be remiss if I didn’t close out my memories without paying special thanks to both of my younger brothers who came into my 6- and 8-year-old life when they were both very welcomed.

I’ve described Ernie’s impact on me in several portions of this memoir. However, Ed, now 88, and Bobby, 86, were additions that exceeded all of my hopes for both of them. During their long lives, they have achieved numerous successes. Bobby’s career as an accomplished pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine, was spent mostly in the state of Connecticut, and while we shared stories and information now and then, the lack of proximity and geographical remote locations on both our parts greatly curtailed opportunities to become closer.

Ed, on the other hand, has a law practice several blocks from my home, and I occasionally ran into him as I lived my busy life. He also primarily resides in nearby Westfield. Therefore, over the years, I've been in close contact with Ed and Pat's family, often watching Mark and Ted because of the leisure I obtained during that part of my life. It is so refreshing to relive the humorous stories about the unique people of Winans Avenue with Ed, who remembers the personalities of those unforgettable people.

He has made it a point to periodically check on my health status, as I continue to live alone in this three-family house that all of my brothers and I lived in during our school years. What makes our discussions so enjoyable and unforgettable is that Ed and I both vividly remember that cast of characters who resided on Winans Avenue.

Unfortunately, just about all of the families are long gone, only these precious stories remain. How nice it is to once in a while play one of those early reels of these beautiful people, each trying in their own way to catapult their families to the next rung of the ladder.

Based on what I have experienced, sometimes I change my thinking about matters. Now for the reader, I don't want you to put too much weight on my opinion because yours are more valuable for you because of what you have experienced throughout your life. When you ask me the meaning of a good life, I reflect on my dealings with people, and I believe I have tried to treat others fairly. Certainly, I've made mistakes now and then because I misread a person or a situation. I honestly feel that I can look at myself in the mirror and not feel guilty about my fairness. Remember if you're an honest person, you can put on any face or say anything to the world, but you can't lie to yourself.

When it comes to financial security, I believe in the following. I valued any amount of money I made during my life. I paid my bills, I didn't spend it if I didn't have it, and I worked hard to invest wisely. The most important thing is for you and your partner to be on the same page financially. Otherwise, it will cause stress and constant argument. It's good if both have the same goals, similar values, and

are honest with each other. If not, friction and unhappiness will “sink your ship.”

I don't believe in hurting another to get ahead because I have a conscience. I couldn't build a future on the embers of a fire I lit unless it was a matter of self-preservation. If your life were at risk, I would say put yourself first.

There are no words to express my joy in becoming a dad. Most people completely forget that bond as they grow older, which is why a child occasionally kills a parent. (The person who gave them life?) Or a parent kills the child! Go figure.

To know that you coupled with someone to produce life is very rewarding...as is nurturing the child who did not come from you. To guide someone from youth to adulthood is rewarding because you're contributing to the benefit of that human being. To help them cope with the difficulties of a changing society while they try to figure out where they fit.

I do believe people are capable of change, and I learned that many times over. It requires listening and understanding not just hearing. The more important question is, “Do I want to change?” To make a change, you must find out all the information involved in it. You must see the situation from different points of view. In my own case, the reason I don't change some things that I could is because the status quo is to my liking.

To learn the new technology of 2025 would make the world friendlier and easier for me. However, I don't want to give up that which I enjoy about the status quo. Many people like reading on a Kindle, but I like the “feel” of a book and enjoy turning the pages because I've been doing that comfortably for over 88 years. That's also why I like writing with a pencil. It feels good and I enjoy what I'm doing. However, just a week after writing the above, I was given a Kindle, and it is now my favorite form of reading. Many of us don't change because we are afraid of what the unknown will do to our lives, but Eddie Rickenbacker, a famous early 20th century pilot, said, “Courage is doing what you're afraid of doing.”

Here's a last-minute insert into my roaming thoughts of how fortunate I have been to live long enough to learn and/or experience things I never would have expected. What's so wonderful is in some cases it has taken "could have done without it" incidents which opened my mind to better understanding events of many decades ago.

For example, as you know if you've read the previous two books and the earlier chapters of this one, my grandfather Giddo was one of the greatest people in my life. When I returned from several years in Japan in July 1956, his mixed tears and smiles of happiness were among the memories I'll never, ever forget. Also during the next 4 years I witnessed his various days of viewing his now-compressed world from the vantage point of a chair he sat on in front of a garden-facing window.

Prior to his final stroke and sudden departure from this life, I watched him walking his yard or home, relying heavily on a sturdy walking cane, fortified at the bottom by a strong rubber attachment to keep it from sliding. Even then he continued to share his vast wisdom with members of the expanding family, no matter what their age. Regardless of when I saw him, he had his trusty cane and even in the family photographs of my parents and also a separate one of my grandparents which are positioned over my mantelpiece, it's something I look at practically every day.

By the way, that cane and a few other less sturdy versions of it and some umbrellas reside conveniently in an umbrella stand, a gift from a dear friend, Jean Reckford, who lived to be 101 in New York City. The stand has been located in the corner of the walkway connecting the dining room to the kitchen for over a decade.

Why do I mention it now? Because on the evening of August 25, 2025, due to the many medications I take, I was making a nightly trip to the bathroom, always being careful not to fall and injure my elderly body. Later I thought about the movie, "A Perfect Storm," where everything conspired to cause an unfortunate tragedy. Although I was wearing slip-free sandals and stepped on a non-skid floor mat, somehow my foot made contact with the very edge of the

mat, I began to skid, which sent the mat flying, my sandal with it, and suddenly I was slipping across the marble bathroom floor of my youth and realized I was not going to land on cushions.

I honestly would be fabricating if I told you what happened and which part of my body bounced off the top of the bathtub, the sink, or anything else before landing on that cold marble floor. All I know is that I was grateful I had turned on the light when I first entered the bathroom and therefore had a very clear view from the bathroom floor of places I had never seen before.

Before I go further I want the reader to know that in spite of my bewildered state of being at that moment, I made several instant decisions. Strange as it seems, the first thing that crossed my mind was that I realized I had not been doing a good enough job cleaning the pedestals of the toilet bowl and sink and vowed that I would have to remedy those eyesores. The second conclusion I reached was I did not want to call 911 and go to a hospital emergency room alone, where I didn't like the probable picture I visualized. Therefore, because I did not want to disrupt the lives of my dear ones or family at 3:00 a.m. in the morning, I proceeded to do what I had to do.

I hurt in so many places I couldn't tell which was the most serious. I will spare the reader details of how difficult it was to get up (with the aid of the bathtub), but when I took inventory of the damage I grabbed the hydrogen peroxide bottle and poured over the series of cuts, skinned arms, and used large bandages and strong ointment to create bandages to stem the bleeding. I dressed the wounds and, having already decided not to bother friends or family, who were too far away to be of immediate help, I finished the job. There was nobody to evaluate it. I was fearful that I had damaged my shoulder, back, or lungs, so I took two Tylenol for the pain, and they helped tremendously. I had already decided I could not interfere with my children, who were immersed in the needs of their own families. I did not want to add pressure to their already-busy lives.

Without going further into detail, suffice it to say that for the past three weeks I've been sleeping on my lounge chair and handling

my life with the assistance of my Giddo's sturdy cane. NOW I understand why he was never seen again without it. By the way, my non-slip floor mat went out with the next day's garbage and those sandals are out of sight, never to be worn again. Thanks to Giddo's stable cane, for a while I had it with me wherever I went. I never knew that a sturdy piece of wood could be such a welcome aid to one's balance when walking! Thank you, Giddo! Now several weeks later, I can relate that according to a trip to Urgent Care I now know that I broke two ribs, that they are healing nicely, and that I am no longer attached to Giddo's cane, except if I feel unsteady.

Now back to my children.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to be alive near my mid-90s because I can see my children make an indentation on their lives and that is most rewarding. To be alive when all my children are in their 60s and have the honor of seeing the character of each of them is better than a grand slam homerun. It also reminds me that one of the great joys of my life was to help produce these children and I know their mother felt the same before she passed on way too early.

When it comes to following your dreams or making money, maybe you can do both. Although during most of my life, I was focused on the job, I got to experience my James Bond dream through 3 years in the Counter Intelligence Corps, and I ever so slightly touched my F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway intrigues by writing several books about my ancestors. And as you know by now, I got to fulfill my greatest dream of raising three extraordinary kids. Nothing could have been better.

During the years that I was growing up, often I heard my elders talking about what a different world we lived in from the one they grew up in. And I did grow to understand what they meant. However, to me the world is much more complicated, more threatening, more difficult to understand, and the incidents of theft, fraud, corruption, and scamming are more predominant and impact more people's lives. My personal view is the internet has been the cause of alienation between human beings. I came to this conclusion while

teaching a communications course about interpersonal relationships. While I believe the internet has unbearably important uses in this world, it has reduced the interchange of ideas, communication among people. Each person has become an island, glued to their iPhone or whatever electronic gadget they use for their source of information and entertainment.

Over the past 25 years, I've watched people change from exchanging information with one another to heavily relying on the internet. I watch people pushing strollers on the sidewalk conversing on their cell phones rather than explaining to their young charges the mysteries of the world in which they have been born. Two students walking down that same street that I traveled years ago coming from school, walking with friends, each talking on their cell phone with someone else, not the person walking beside them. Although I gave all three of my children books about the computer and told them it would be in their future, I did not expect it or want it to control their future by competing for every waking moment.

Yes, you can find answers to almost any question on that umbilically attached phone, but so often it's to the exclusion of sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with your partners in this universe. I personally have created a barrier to using these new gadgets because I wanted to hold onto my values of yesteryear. I knew I could not do both, so I stubbornly held on to those which fulfilled me. Even though being heavily criticized, I have only accepted the minimum of new technology. I realize I have only been able to survive because my children and friend Jane became my IT Department. This has enabled me to maintain my world of human feelings while dwelling on the fringes of the new world most people have joined. You cannot fully enjoy both, and I didn't want to lose the beauty and fulfilling of the touchy/feely world that I grew up in. Unfortunately, the new world because of the internet has dramatically increased the number of scams, hackers, frauds, people who are devoting their entire working lives to steal from others who work for their money. That is why I am so intolerant of those who prey on elderly people like me to try

and bilk us for whatever they can. They go to great efforts, and you must be vigilant. Because they try to deprive me of the great pleasure of living in this world, I don't hesitate to let them know what I think of them when I catch them at it. (They are so dumb because they keep coming back for more.)

I must relate to you a series of scams that have been attempted on me, and I am speechless. No less than 10 times in the past year I have received phone calls from someone purporting to be one of my grandsons...one tried to be my granddaughter. He sounded a little bit like one of my grandsons and knew minor details about him. I was shook the first time, but never again. I "play along" with the scam, offering my support. The caller always says, they have a broken nose from the car accident which was their fault. They insist that I must keep the problem "between us," not to speak to his parents. Usually he's in jail, and can only speak for a few minutes, but I should copy down a phone number and call his "lawyer." I quickly ask him questions about his non-existent twin sister, and he is always doomed by his incorrect answer. I must admit, somewhat embarrassingly, I then proceed to blister his story using most of the profanity I learned as a 12-year-old. Surprisingly, he never replies, just disconnects the call. I usually sit there for a minute, shaking my head at the stupid affront.

In spite of those weird episodes, for months I've been trying to chronicle many aspects of my long, beautiful journey through life. I had forgotten some things, and I even avoided a few I don't want to remember. They are all part of life. The good times and the bad times. What I learned about the bad ones was that in every case, "This, too, shall pass."

Now as I pause and look at life over my shoulder, various thoughts co-mingle with the passing of time. Ellis Island, that guiding light for immigrants seeking a new beginning, officially closed its doors in 1954. It has been replaced by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). That's where immigrants are instructed to go when arriving in the United States. The CIC, which helped to keep the United States safe for decades, was dismantled and melded into the Army's

regular Intelligence Services in 1961. My loving ancestors have one-by-one lived out their lives, dedicated to successfully assimilating into the American fabric, and passed on, none ever returning to their native Lebanon. They have all left us with many life lessons, which have helped each generation of the family cope with the challenges of an ever-changing world.

And for me, I have never been able to erase my unthinking behavior when I almost robbed my younger brother of his most prized possession, the gift of life. I shudder each time I recall how close I came to killing that exceptional 88-year-old brother before he had an opportunity to soar into the sky in search of his own destiny. How I almost brought that heroic immigrant story – from the young girl in the cargo ship, to the young family of peddlers on the route, to the family in The Beehive working on the railroad and the Ohio and New Jersey silk mills, to the untimely deaths of a young wife and still younger child – to a most tragic end.

Overall, I can consider myself to be very fortunate. My most prized possessions are the three long letters from my children that reside on my night table. In those letters, they detail their love, appreciation, and gratitude that I am their father. The letters are about 5 years old. At least once a year, right before turning off the light, I indulge myself to moments of serenity. I read them slowly, savoring each word, embedding each memory of the events in their lives that they cherish. I then go to sleep aware that when I leave permanently, I have not only added some outstanding people to our world, but I am confident in their ability to make it a better place.

As for my eventually exiting from this life, I have always attempted to be original, to be creative. However, when you come across words that tell it precisely as you intend, don't be afraid of accepting them. A few years ago, as I was reading a wonderful World War II trilogy by the gifted writer Rick Atkinson, I came across a quote, which perfectly expresses the message I want to leave for my dear loved ones (I bracketed my own two amendments to the quote). It follows:

“Caleb Milne, a young stretcher bearer in the Tunisian Campaign in 1943, was killed by a German mortar round. He had written in his final letter to his mother: ‘...a vivid, wonderful world. So full of winter and spring, warm rain and cold snow, adventures and contentment, good things and bad. How often you will have me near you when smoke drifts across the wind, or the first tulips arrive, or the sky darkens in a summer storm. Think of me today and the days to come, as I am thinking of you this minute, not gone or alone or dead, but part of the earth [sea] beneath [around] you, part of the heart that must not be lonely.’ ”

These are the words I want to leave with you.

